A FAMILY FEUD

AFTER THE GERMAN

OF

LUDWIG HARDER

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CHAPTER I.

THE scene of our story is a province of Germany which, but moderately provided with railways, and almost secluded from the busy traffic of the present century, may be regarded as the very paradise of a landed aristocracy. It was towards the close of the summer; the sun was declining in the west,—its rays beamed with mocking splendour full in the faces of the light-haired, dull-faced peasants, who were occupied in gathering in their master's grain, and stole brightly from the busy harvest-fields into the gray stillness of the old mansion-house of Buchdorf, which lay with its front looking abroad into the green alleys of the park, while the windows at the back opened upon the spacious ill-paved court-yard surrounded by the farm-buildings and opening into the ancient avenue of lindens.

For miles around, forests, pasture-land, and cultured fields all belonged to the Arning estate. Its present possessor was a childless man of fifty-five, sturdy and well built in figure with a sunburned face and blue eyes that beamed with good humour. He troubled himself not at all about the world in general, and very little indeed about the smaller world of his own estates, of which he, Kurt von Arning, owned four,—Ermsdal, the only one strictly entailed in the male line, Buchdorf, Harsbye, and Grasort. He had taken up his abode in Buchdorf, the largest of the four, and there he lived from

year's end to year's end, content to be left in the peaceful enjoyment of his arm-chair after a somewhat stormy experience of married life. He was a genial companion, given to hospitality, and, even where it cost him trouble, the most benevolent of masters and landlords.

Thus it is easy to understand that throughout the province, and, indeed, wherever his name was known, Kurt von Arning was an object of cordial good will,—although the measure of respect accorded him among his tenantry was not immense. The centre around which everything upon the estates revolved, the master whom all obeyed without a murmur, was Otto von Arning, Kurt's young cousin, the boy whom he had declared the heir to all his possessions.

Before we say anything about this cousin, let us give one moment's attention to the recent history of the main branch of the Von Arning family. For generations its chief had always occupied its entailed property of Ermsdal, and both family and estate had deteriorated, until Kurt's father changed the whole aspect of affairs by boldly setting at naught aristocratic prejudices and marrying a bourgeoise heiress, who added Buchdorf, Harsbye, and Grasort to the family possessions. Kurt was the sole offspring of this union, and upon his marriage, when scarcely twenty-one, he received from his father Grasort as a wedding-gift. Here he passed nearly twenty years as unhappy as every man must be who wakes from a dream of boyish passion to find himself mated with a thoroughly uncongenial companion. At the age of forty he returned to Buchdorf, a childless widower, only just in time to close the eyes of the father whom he had tenderly loved, and who had survived his wife but two short years. As the child of a bourgeoise mother, Kurt could not inherit the worthless estate of Ermsdal. That passed to the baby Otto von Arning,—sole child of a cousin, who, left an orphan at an early age, had been adopted as it were by the old baron, and had been to

Kurt, during all his boyhood and early manhood, as a brother. The most devoted affection had subsisted between the two; indeed, on one occasion when the lads were hunting together, Kurt owed his life to Ludwig von Arning's intrepid affection. When Kurt left Buchdorf upon his marriage, Ludwig had remained there a prop and stay to his adopted parents' declining years,—only leaving them three years before the old baron's death for a residence in the capital, where the Von Arning influence procured him a post under government, upon his marriage to the high-born but needy Augusta von Tretten. The confinement of a city life, however, and the pressure of new duties, ill suited a man whose youth had been passed amid the fresh air and healthy occupations of the country. Ludwig von Arning survived but by a few months his wife, who had died a year after the marriage in giving birth to the little Otto. Kurt's affection and care soothed his cousin's last moments. No blow could have struck more heavily the warm-hearted, easy baron than the loss of this companion of his youth. The dying man's whole thought was for his boy Otto, and Kurt gladly made him a solemn promise to regard him as his own son, and to see that his future was such as befitted their ancient name. Thus, when Baron Kurt found himself a childless man alone at Buchdorf, well cured, as he thought, of all desire for matrimony, he took to his home and heart the orphan Otto von Arning, who, with his dead mother's elderly sister, Bernhardine von Tretten, took up his abode beneath his cousin's roof, and was regarded by all as his future heir. In the care for this boy the kindly, indolent widower had hitherto found all the occupation he desired either for head or for heart.

Fräulein von Tretten was a canoness of a poor and strict order in H——; a woman of about Baron Kurt's age, although looking much older in spite of faultless teeth and hair still so dark as to seem in certain lights blue-black. Above this hair

the white muslin high cap of her order showed in strong contrast. She wore stiff cuffs of snowy linen around her large bony wrists, and the collar above her coarse woollen gown was of the same material. Everything about this woman, from her expressive but unattractive face to her deep harsh voice and the slight trace of hair on her upper lip, was stiff, ungainly, and unfeminine.

Fourteen years had passed since the death of Baron Kurt's father. It was, as we have said, a sunny afternoon in August, and Kurt, who troubled himself not at all about seed-time or harvest, was absent upon one of his frequent visits to the capital.

In an apartment which opened by folding-doors upon a great stone terrace overlooking the court-yard there sat, behind an antique table covered with deeds and papers, young Otto von Arning, now just about completing his sixteenth year. He would have been thought much older; in his large gray eyes there were discernible great determination and force of intellect, but very little of boyish enthusiasm. Undeveloped as his features yet were, there was no denying their expression of pride, perhaps not unmingled with a slight degree of youthful arrogance.

Upon the table before him lay open his cousin's ledgers for the past year. He had undertaken to overlook and arrange them, and was evidently absorbed in his work, for his rather pale face had become slightly flushed as he bent over the books and the columns of figures grew rapidly beneath his pen. It was a figure to interest the observer,—this grave young fellow, with manly resolve visible through all the boyishness of his age.

Such was, doubtless, Aunt Bernhardine's opinion as she sat opposite her nephew at the other end of the room, the inevitable knitting-needles clicking in her busy fingers, her small black eyes resting from time to time with an intense gaze that

was part tenderness, part expectation, upon the writer at the table. She had already made several attempts to attract Otto's attention, but young Arning seemed quite lost to the outer world. He sat motionless, except for an impatient toss back now and then of the lock of dark hair which fell too low upon his broad white forehead. Deep silence reigned in the room, broken only by the buzzing of the flies, the click of the knitting-needles, and the scratching of Otto's pen upon the paper. The cuckoo upon the old-fashioned clock in the corner had shrilly declared it to be seven o'clock, and Aunt Bernhardine had remarked, "The heat has lasted a long while to-day"—Otto seemed to have heard neither; but suddenly a slight bustle in the court-yard, the cautious dragging forth of a wagon, arrested his attention.

He hastily sprang up and went out on the veranda. The steward and several labourers were dragging a large wagon from the carriage-house.

Otto leaned over the balustrade of the veranda. "What are you doing there, Herr Warne?" he called down.

The man whom he addressed was evidently annoyed by the question; but he replied, "We are going out once more, Herr Baron."

"It is a holiday evening." And Otto took out his large silver watch, the terror of every one employed upon the estate, for it was as punctual to the minute as its master.

"True, Herr Baron," the steward replied, swallowing his vexation, "but old Schäfer thinks we shall have a storm, and he is weather-wise. In an hour we can get in all the grain on the lower meadow, and then——"

"No matter for that," Otto said, with a shrug; "my cousin desires that the holiday evenings should be rigidly observed; and, besides, is there not to be a wedding in Buchdorf to-night?" And he turned towards the peasants, who were enjoying the steward's discomfiture.

The men took off their caps. "Yes, Herr Baron."

"But," the steward ventured to remonstrate, "a storm would cause so much loss——"

"We must bear it," Otto interrupted him. "Put back the wagon, Herr Warne. My cousin's orders must be obeyed."

And, without waiting to see the result of his words, young Arning re-entered the room, and sat down at his writing-table again.

"But, Otto, you ought not to have done that," said Aunt Bernhardine, reprovingly. "If old Schäfer is right, and we do have a storm, it will cause the loss of at least several hundred thalers."

"I only obeyed Kurt's order," was the laconic reply.

"Kurt never would have objected to any arrangement of yours."

"Perhaps not; but it is not my place to make arrangements here."

"Why not, if they are good ones? Kurt's strict rules are all nonsense, especially when he is not here to see them put in force. The people could just as well have left off work an hour earlier to-morrow. They would have been quite as well pleased, and the wheat would not have been spoiled. No, Otto," she continued, as her nephew showed no intention of replying, "much as you love Kurt, you must admit that you never would have given such an order."

"Perhaps not I certainly should act differently from Kurt in many ways," Otto now quietly replied.

"Why do you not, then? If Kurt takes no pains to keep the property in good condition for you, you might be allowed to do it for yourself. You have some claims here."

"After him,—yes. But at present Kurt is master in Buchdorf; and let us hope he may long continue so."

The words were negligently spoken, and sounded neither like a devout wish nor a hypocritical phrase, but like the usual re-

buff to a frequent suggestion. Aunt Bernhardine evidently regarded them in this light, for she fell silent, and dropped her eyes upon her knitting with an injured air.

Then came a succession of messengers, huntsmen, and labourers. The young baron attended to all their demands without interrupting his work.

"Otto," the canoness began again, as the door closed upon the last of them.

"Well?"

"You have given holiday to every one else; how long are you going to work over those accounts?"

"Until I have finished them."

"Indeed you have been writing long enough. The books cannot be in very good order."

"Order! Last year's harvest is not settled up."

"That is too bad! How can Warne be so negligent? And, stranger still, how can Kurt put up with such neglect?"

"It is his way, you know."

"An admirable way it is."

"Don't let it vex you, aunt," the young baron said, laughing. "I promise that the herculean labour of to-day shall always impress me with Kurt's terrible example, and teach me, if ever I am master of Buchdorf, to be as punctual and exact as clock-work."

"*If* ever you are——"

Her tone was so strange that Otto looked up, surprised.

"You mean that I may die first?" he asked.

"It is possible that you may outlive Kurt and yet never be master at Buchdorf."

"How so?"

"If Kurt, for instance, should marry——"

Otto dropped his pen and burst into a merry laugh, in which, however, his aunt did not join.

"You always took too careless a view of the matter," she

continued. "His father's will left him everything, and if he should marry and have heirs there would be nothing for you but Ermsdal, the only strictly entailed estate, with its ruinous old dwelling-house and scarcely two acres of land worth anything—— So you need not laugh so foolishly, Otto," she interrupted herself, angrily. "I should think the case sufficiently grave."

"I beg pardon, aunt, but Kurt and matrimony—indeed it is too comical!" And again he laughed heartily.

"And if he should marry?"

"But he won't."

"Are you quite sure of that? I had to take a deal of trouble to get him out of the way of Theresa Flieder, Madame von Reise's companion. He all but declared himself her suitor."

Otto's laughter ceased, and he sat thoughtfully playing with his pen.

After a short reverie he began to write again, but another interruption was at hand. A servant brought in the evening mail. One of the letters was addressed to the Freiin von Tretten.

"From Kurt," Otto said, as he handed it to the old lady. "What can he have to tell you before he comes home to-morrow?"

Aunt Bernhardine hastily tore open the envelope. Her forebodings were soon to be fulfilled.

"Shameful, faithless, detestable!" she exclaimed, after reading the first lines.

Otto turned round. He had never seen Aunt Bernhardine like this before. Her sallow complexion turned livid, her black eyes glittered, and her hand trembled.

"Good heavens!" he cried, rising, and hastening to her side; "what has happened to him?"

"Read that!" the canoness replied, thrusting the letter

into his hands. There were two sheets within the envelope, one addressed to Bernhardine and one to Otto.

The baron wrote to Fräulein von Tretten that twenty-four hours previously he had been married to Fräulein Theresa Flieder. He begged Aunt Bernhardine to prepare Otto for this intelligence, which would precede by only a few hours the arrival of his bride and himself. He desired that the servants might be apprised of their coming, and everything be as well prepared for their reception as the shortness of the time would permit, and concluded by expressing the hope that Aunt Bernhardine would extend to his wife the good will she had always manifested towards himself, and that she would continue, as heretofore, to consider his house her home.

The letter to Otto was by no means so naturally written. Kurt could not feel quite free from blame towards him; but instead of confessing this, and defending his course of conduct in a frank, manly way, he committed the error, so common with weak natures, of attempting to hide his disquiet behind the affectation of perfect ease and confidence in himself. He wrote as if nothing but pleasure could result for his young cousin from this marriage; spoke of the charming mistress who would bring new life into the old mansion, and of how much more comfortable and happy Otto would be there than ever before,—the worst course he could possibly have pursued with a youth of Otto's peculiar character.

Young Arning read the letter from end to end, slowly and in perfect silence. His face changed, his hand leaned more and more heavily upon the table beside which he stood. When he had finished, he deliberately refolded the sheet and laid it aside. Very pale he looked, but he still said not one word.

Aunt Bernhardine never turned her eyes from him. Their previous conversation had not led her to suppose that this news would affect him so deeply.

"Otto!" she cried, troubled at his strange silence; "dear Otto, do speak and tell me what you are thinking of this intelligence."

Otto's compressed lips were at last unclosed. "My cousin does not waste many words in telling me that I am a beggar," he replied, almost in a whisper, but with intense bitterness.

His tone went to Aunt Bernhardine's heart. "A beggar? No, Otto; there must be some means to compel Kurt von Arning to provide for the man who must succeed at Ermsdal, the oldest, if the poorest, of the estates now in his possession. No child of a bourgeoise marriage like this can deprive you of that, my poor boy. The court must be applied to, legal advice——"

Otto interrupted her. "The court?" he repeated, haughtily. "What are you talking about, Aunt Bernhardine? Our ancient and spotless name bandied about in men's mouths? every newspaper telling of our quarrel—all for the sake of lands and gold? No, I never will consent to it!"

"Then I shall do what I can," the canoness rejoined, nowise daunted.

"You will do nothing, Aunt Bernhardine," Otto cried, passionately, the fine glow of indignation upon his face making him look positively handsome. "You will do nothing, for it would be useless. If you could possibly drag me into a lawsuit with Kurt, I should put a bullet through my brains before it was decided——"

He stopped short. The canoness could not speak further with him upon the subject while he was thus agitated.

"Dear aunt," he began, after a while, with an entire change of voice and manner, "will you not be kind enough to arrange for the reception of the bride and bridegroom? When Kurt comes, excuse my absence as best you may. I must be more composed than I am at present when we meet."

And, thrusting Kurt's letter into his pocket, he put on his cap, threw his fowling-piece over his shoulder, and hurried out to plunge into the depths of the park.

CHAPTER II.

MEANTIME a travelling-carriage was driving slowly through the Arning estates towards Buchdorf. Within it sat the lord of the land, and beside him his young wife, a woman with the bearing of a queen, and sparkling brown eyes lighting up finely-formed features.

Neither husband nor wife spoke. She sat complacently looking abroad over the acres of which she was now mistress, and perhaps thinking of the time when, as a humble companion, she had first travelled this very road. Kurt was by no means as cheerful as it beseems a husband of only four-and-twenty hours to be: his heart beat with an agitation that increased as he approached his home. He knew that, carried away by passion, he had blasted hopes which he himself had created and fostered, and he was ashamed, not of his marriage, but of the haste and secrecy with which it had been concluded.

But another voice within him boldly defied these prickings of conscience. What actual claim had Otto upon him? Was he not his own master? Was he not the lawful master here? If his first marriage had not been childless, Otto would never have dreamed of inheriting his property.

Thus the newly-married pair arrived at Buchdorf. The spacious court-yard looked deserted; the house seemed empty There was no sign of festivity; no token of the merest welcome. A maid-servant in her working-clothes came from the

dairy. She curtsied negligently, and was passing on, when Baron von Arning called, sternly, "What, Stina, have you no word of welcome to your new mistress?"

The girl clasped her hands and gazed at the stranger—"as stupidly as possible," Theresa angrily thought. But Stina was by no means stupid; she instantly conjectured why it was that Fräulein Bernhardine had suddenly taken her departure half an hour previously. Still, it was strange, and she could only repeat, in her South German patois, "The new mistress!"

"Yes, yes!" Kurt cried, impatiently. "Did not Fräulein von Tretten tell you that I was to arrive with Madame von Arning this evening?"

"No, Herr Baron, the Fräulein went away half an hour ago; but she left a letter for the Herr Baron."

Kurt bit his lip.

"Where is Baron Otto?"

"I saw the young baron going out into the park a few hours since."

"Well, then, at least call Herr Warne."

"He went to the village at seven."

The baron stamped his foot.

"At any rate, I shall see them at supper. Is it nearly ready?"

"The Herr Baron must excuse us, but, since the Fräulein was gone and the young baron and the steward were not at home, the cook, Marianne, went down to the wedding in the village."

"And we are not even to have any supper!" Kurt cried, now fairly angry.

"I will send for Marianne immediately, Herr Baron."

"Do so."

Kurt offered his arm to his young wife and conducted her into the house. "Forgive this reception, Theresa," he said, gloomily. "There must have been some misunderstanding."

"Some misunderstanding indeed," she replied, proudly indignant.

In the sitting-room the baron found Aunt Bernhardine's letter, which left him in no doubt as to her opinion of his conduct. After telling him plainly what she thought of him, she concluded by declaring that never again would she set foot in Buchdorf.

Kurt tore the letter in bits. He did not venture to show it to his wife.

The cook returned, and the hungry couple were at last regaled with an excellent supper. Nevertheless, the evening passed drearily enough. Kurt was anxious about Otto, who did not return. Had he, too, left the house that had for so many years been his home? To Theresa these first hours seemed to forebode ill for the future.

At last, after ten o'clock, Otto's step was heard in the hall. The baron started; the decisive moment had arrived.

If Kurt had expected that Otto would heap him with reproaches or treat him with withering scorn, he was greatly mistaken. In Otto's pale face there was visible no trace of anger or scorn. He did not even look gloomy, only extremely grave.

He greeted the pair courteously, and turned to offer his congratulations to the bride, whom he had never seen before, although she had spent some months upon a neighbouring estate.

Theresa's glance rested upon her young cousin with keen scrutiny. His self-reliant bearing, his settled demeanour, so little in harmony with his almost boyish appearance, the assumed repose of his manner towards her, had anything but a soothing effect upon the irritation she already felt. She interrupted his congratulatory speech by observing that she could hardly believe in his sincerity, since he had not thought it worth while to be present when she arrived. She cared little, she added, for mere words of course.

She had thought to impress her young relative, perhaps confuse him, by her manner; but in this she made the mistake of judging Otto von Arning by his years and not by his intellect.

The young baron did not even change countenance. "I thank you, madame, for relieving me from the duty of uttering mere words," he said, with a low bow. "Pray consider my congratulations unspoken."

"Otto!" Kurt cried, in dismay.

Theresa drew herself up haughtily. "Baron Kurt's indulgence makes you over-bold, my young cousin."

Kurt felt that it was his imperative duty to speak now, if he would not appear contemptible in the eyes of his bride.

"Yes, Otto," he said, with unwonted severity, "you have disappointed and displeased me exceedingly to-day. We arrive here to find nothing in readiness for our reception, not even the simplest supper. Aunt Bernhardine has left, and you are out hunting. Even the servants had had no instructions from you. Surely I had a right to expect some service at your hands."

"At mine?" Otto exclaimed, with peculiar emphasis, adding, with quiet scorn in his voice, "You really should have applied to Herr Warne if you desired to celebrate your marriage with a triumphal arch and the school-children dressed in white."

As we know, he had begged Aunt Bernhardine to prepare for his cousin's reception, and had relied upon her doing so; but, irritated and sore as he was, he would rather have bitten out his tongue than condescend to say one word in self-justification.

"I think, Kurt, we had better withdraw," Theresa said, haughtily, "and leave this unmannerly boy to his tutor until he has learned how to conduct himself."

The lightning that flashed in Otto's eyes warned the baron that it was time to pour oil on the waters.

"After all," he cried, with forced cheerfulness, "what is there to make a scene about? There is no reason for any misunderstanding between you two. You and Aunt Bernhardine are all wrong in taking matters so tragically. Good heavens! I bring a young and lovely wife to this old home, and instead of rejoicing to welcome her, you flee from us as if we were wehr-wolves. It really is too ridiculous!"

This awkward attempt to smooth matters was the last straw to break down Otto's hardly-won self-restraint. Scarcely himself, he replied, in a voice which he vainly strove to steady, "No more of this farce, Kurt; I am no longer such a child as not to understand what you have done. You might at least spare me your sneers at the annihilation of my future."

"But, Otto, what an idea! be sure that——"

"Why do you condescend to argue with such folly?" Theresa sharply interrupted him.

Kurt made one more effort not to appear weak in the eyes of the wife whom he fondly loved.

"It would really seem, Otto, that my indulgence has been at fault, since it has taught you thus to forget your position towards me. Let me, once for all, deprecate all interference or criticism on your part."

"Whether your own oft-repeated words give me a right to 'criticism' of your marriage, I will not now discuss. It would be of no use, for I waive the right if there be any such. But surely I had a right to be informed of a step so deeply affecting my future at some more fitting time than just three hours ago, and after some more fitting fashion than by this—scrawl." And he threw the baron's letter on the table, and went towards the door.

"Madame will certainly excuse my frankness," he said, coldly, turning once more before he reached it, "since I but comply with her express desire in avoiding mere words of course."

"Otto!" his cousin called after him, "Otto, I pray you, one word more." But the young Freiherr had vanished.

And thus one short quarter of an hour had made foes for a lifetime of two people, each possessed of qualities and characteristics that might under happier circumstances have made them firm friends.

CHAPTER III.

At eight o'clock the next morning the baroness began a round of inspection as mistress of the mansion. She asked a maid whom she met, where the breakfast-table was laid.

"On the balcony, to-day, madame," was the reply.

"But why, when the weather is so threatening?"

"Oh, the Herr Baron always breakfasts where the young master has breakfasted."

"Indeed?" and Theresa stepped out upon the balcony. "Two people have already breakfasted here."

"Yes, madame, the tutor has just gone."

"Did he breakfast with Baron Otto?"

"Oh, no, madame. The young master breakfasts at five o'clock."

"And where is *the young master* now?"

"Out hunting, madame."

"And the tutor?"

"Gone fishing, madame."

Here was an edifying state of affairs! The master of the house rose at nine, the tutor was gone a-fishing, his charge was ranging the forest in search of sport, and the kettle was kept boiling above the spirit-lamp from five o'clock until nine that three different people might have their breakfast at three

different hours! Theresa, fond as she might be of ease and leisure, yet had a true woman's love of order. It was evidently her part to evoke it from this chaos, and establish her position as mistress here. She had a yet bolder design,—nothing less than to make her young cousin more gentle, docile, and obedient.

Towards noon she met the tutor in one of the alleys of the park. He was sauntering along, his fishing-rod over his shoulder, humming a tune. The baroness joined him, and, after informing him that his charge had done but little credit to his training on the previous evening, gently but firmly entreated him, if he would justify the confidence reposed in him, to keep a stricter watch upon his pupil, and especially to see to it that he had regular hours for study.

Brinkmann listened gravely and apparently with great respect to all she had to say, but she little knew how the clever tutor was studying her while he thus listened. As she turned away he looked after her with a half-contemptuous smile of pity, and muttered to himself, "Success to your hopes, my fair and haughty dame! A year will bring you some strange experience. If you were wise now, you would sooner thrust both those little hands into a hornet's nest than measure yourself against young Otto von Arning."

But, unfortunately, Frau von Arning was not wise enough; she was elated by her new dignity, and with the best intentions in the world, but without any due consideration of character and circumstances, she recklessly plunged into a strife which was to embitter the best years of her life.

Her husband, the steward, and the servants willingly obeyed the rein which the fair mistress had so resolutely taken into her hands. With Otto alone did she encounter opposition, and naturally all her energy was concentrated to overcome this on the part of "the boy," as she called him in most mistaken scorn. She had desired that her young cousin should

have regular hours for study,—the consequence was that he hardly studied at all; she declared it the duty of so young a man to be at home at supper-time,—Otto sometimes did not return home until towards morning.

This defiance of her authority irritated the baroness excessively, and she was still more vexed to find that neither Kurt nor Herr Brinkmann would undertake to call the young "master" to account for his conduct.

"Otto has always had his own way, my dear child," was Kurt's constant reply to her complaints. "I am afraid it is too late to attempt a change."

At last the baroness could no longer restrain her impatience. She determined to set her lord a good example. "Some one must take pains with the boy's neglected education," she said to herself, by way of excuse for what she did; and one day, when Kurt returned from his morning stroll about the estate, Theresa met him with the edifying news that she herself had taken Otto to task, "since the tutor seemed afraid to remind him of his duty." She had not "minced matters," but had given the young fellow clearly to understand what were her ideas of his duty and his present conduct. All that now remained was that her authority should be firmly maintained. Otto had not contradicted her; he had quietly listened to all she had to say, and had promised that he would reflect upon it. True, his manner had been rather independent, but she hoped that time would reform that also.

Kurt did not share her hopes; he feared trouble in the future. The baroness, too, was not exactly comfortable when first the late breakfast and then the dinner-hour passed without Otto. It was late in the afternoon when he made his appearance. Kurt sprang up to greet him, asking where he had been and what he had been doing. In the baron's manner there was a mute entreaty for forgiveness, and perhaps out of sympathy Otto responded more cordially than he had done

since his cousin's marriage. The baroness, however, regarded her husband with some scorn, fearing lest his easy, compliant nature should make of no effect all her educational efforts.

"May I speak with you for a few moments in your own room?" the young baron gravely asked after a while.

"Have you such mighty secrets to discuss that they cannot be mentioned in the garden?" Theresa said, with a smile.

"Matters between guardian and ward, madame," Otto briefly replied; and the two cousins walked towards the house.

"I know what you want to speak with me about, my dear fellow," Kurt began, as soon as they were seated in the latter's so-called study. "Theresa had a talk with you this morning. Make your mind quite easy; it shall not occur again."

"You are mistaken," Otto replied; "I would not have troubled you about such a trifle. The Frau Baroness's admonition is only the first link of a chain to be wound about me which I have no mind to endure. Your wife has undertaken a fruitless task,—as irksome to her as to me. And that we all three may be spared any repetition of such unedifying attempts to control me, I think, Kurt, it is best I should leave Buchdorf."

The baron gazed sorrowfully at the young cousin whose power of insight and strength of character so greatly exceeded his own.

"Otto! Otto!" he cried, with emotion, and almost with tears. "Good God! if I had known that my marriage would make us enemies! Now you will go to Aunt Bernhardine, and——"

"Hear me out," Otto gently entreated, laying his hand upon his cousin's arm. "Indeed I did not mean to reproach you in any way. What I have to say is to the guardian, not to the relative. You know that you yourself taught me to consider myself your heir. Your marriage has disinherited me." Kurt

bowed his head like a criminal before his judge, while Otto quietly proceeded. "And you know, too, that I could not live upon the bounty of your heirs, a useless incumbrance upon the estate——"

"But you cannot tell what the future may bring forth," Kurt interrupted him. "Wait, and let matters arrange themselves."

"I have not the patience to await uncertain results. I must be independent, if I would live."

"And you would like a portion of the estates assigned to you?" asked Kurt, thinking he understood it all now, and greatly relieved. "Be frank, my boy; you are morally entitled to it, and I will gladly make some arrangement——"

Otto recoiled. "No; I do not desire to deprive your possible heirs of their inheritance," he said, firmly. "I wish to achieve independence by my own exertions. Supply me with the means for study, and I will embrace some calling that shall give me a support and a position in the world and enable me to confront your heirs without envy. Are you agreed?"

Kurt was more than agreed; he was not only delighted with the clear-sightedness which led Otto to select the only course sure to secure future harmony, but gratified by the affection dictating the desire for such harmony.

"You are perfectly right, my dear fellow!" he exclaimed, cordially, "and have, I confess, relieved me immensely. I need not tell you how sorry I am to part with you; but, if it must be, I had much rather lose your presence for a time than your affection. Go, then, and God go with you! I make one condition, however: that you still regard Buchdorf as your home, and do not spend your vacations in M—— with Aunt Bernhardine. Promise me this."

Otto promised, and it was forthwith decided in amity that young Arning should go immediately to the gymnasium in

M——. Kurt, who was grateful from his soul to his young relative for this solution of all difficulties, took upon himself the providing of a suitable position for Herr Brinkmann.

When the cousins returned to the baroness, Otto's fowling-piece was again thrown across his shoulder, and he walked away, simply saying to Theresa that he should not return to supper that night.

The baroness comprehended that her well-conceived educational designs had been frustrated by the headstrong youth. And when Kurt informed her of the new project she could scarcely understand, much less share, his unaffected delight. She could not instantly approve a solution so directly opposed to her own views; she was too much of a woman to forget present defeat in the hope of future peace and harmony, and she regarded as cunning Otto's reserve towards her.

CHAPTER IV.

EIGHT days after this, Otto repaired to the gymnasium at M——, where, thanks to the attainments which the baroness had unjustly undervalued, he soon took high rank.

It was a gay life upon which he now entered. His cousin's letters of introduction, his ancient name, soon introduced him to high official circles, where his wonderfully precocious intellect, his fine abilities, from which a brilliant future was prophesied for him, and a quickly-developed social talent, made him a welcome and honoured guest. He selected for his associates men much older than himself, and attained an excellent position among them.

People wondered at his bold, clear expression of opinion, and laughed at the dry irony with which he was wont to

treat any unpleasant topic, especially his relations with his cousins.

In the second year after his marriage a fine healthy little girl was born to the lord of Buchdorf, and named Beatrice. Naturally, the matter was much talked of in M——, where the Arnings were widely known. Otto's only remark upon an occasion when allusion was made to the expensive festivity celebrated in honour of the child's baptism was, "In fact, it is I who have paid for it all with three estates."

Another time, when a companion laughingly inquired why the Frau Baroness had not asked him to be godfather to her child, he replied, "Why, because I should not have called it Beatrice, but Dolores."

Both these remarks were reported at Buchdorf, and did not, of course, help to improve relations between Theresa and her young cousin.

More than two years had passed since the evening when Kurt and his bride had found so disagreeable a reception awaiting them at Buchdorf, and various changes had taken place in the Arning family.

The estate, under Herr Warne's stewardship, was managed after the old negligent fashion. But within the house reigned the quiet and harmony in which the baron's soul delighted. His days glided happily by in the possession of an adored wife and of a charming little daughter. Theresa's very life was bound up in the child. She took no interest whatever in Otto's affairs, and when he came to Buchdorf,—which he did two or three times a year,—each, by mutual consent, rather avoided the other, so that there was no opportunity for further discord. And yet the gulf between them was not bridged over, and there were not wanting those who would gladly have widened it.

After a brilliant examination, Otto was entered at the University of B—— as a student of law. Here he at times attended a variety of lectures, at times none at all. With some of the

professors he ranked very high, with others but indifferently; by his fellow-students he was idolized.

One would hardly have recognized the pale, reserved, almost gloomy boy in the gay student standing on the threshold of the old mansion-house at Buchdorf with an embroidered cap stuck on one side of his dark curls, high boots, riding-whip in hand, and a pet spaniel at his heels. There could not be found a bolder rider, a better shot, or one more ready at a fray than Otto von Arning. Theresa could discover in him no trace of the cool reflection and staid repose of former days, and, with a shrug, she concluded that they had never really existed.

To Kurt, amazed at the change in his cousin, she declared that Otto had been misled by evil companions, and that reproof only excited him to all kinds of mad follies. She had always known the boy to be weak and conceited, and had, therefore, disapproved of liberating him so soon from all control. She was mistaken; now, as formerly, Otto's course of life was in accordance with a well-considered plan of existence. Of old, when he regarded himself as the certain heir to large estates, he had endeavoured to form himself to his ideal of a landed proprietor; now, when he belonged to himself alone, he meant to take advantage of his freedom, and, as he once phrased it to a jovial companion, "be a merry devil, since he was a poor one."

Theresa, who had never before seen anything of students, and held in horror the life at the university, regarded her cousin as utterly lost, and did not conceal her opinion from her husband, who ventured to hint as much one day to Otto. Naturally enough, the gay student scarcely understood Kurt's embarrassed allusions. Mad pranks and duels increased, and at last Baron Otto von Arning was—suspended.

He bore his fate with great equanimity. To Kurt's remonstrances he replied that he had long wished to exchange the small university of B—— for one of more consequence,

and he passed the time before the beginning of a fresh term at Buchdorf.

Towards Theresa he conducted himself, as he always had done, courteously but coldly. A peculiar relation, however, was formed between him and Beatrice, at this time a charming, dark-eyed little creature, the very ideal of a child three years of age. It was no secret at Buchdorf that, lovely as the child was, Otto regarded her with no friendly eye, he was thought to have almost a dislike for her. No one had ever seen him kiss the pretty little thing whose beauty won for her the caresses of every stranger visiting her parents.

Strange to say, this dislike was not mutual. Whether it was that Beatrice possessed no spark of that happy instinct which tells a child so surely where to turn for affection, or whether Otto's very reserve attracted her, certain it was that she would stretch out her arms to Cousin Otto even from her mother's lap. She recognized his voice, and even his step, at a distance, would follow him everywhere whenever he would permit it, and, although self-willed enough with others, obeyed Cousin Otto's slightest word.

And yet, although he never caressed the child, Otto took a great deal of notice of her. Kurt rejoiced to see this, but Theresa never saw her child in her enemy's arms without a secret tremor; and the little one's preference for him seemed so utterly strange and inexplicable that in darker times it would surely have suggested magic. Through her maid, also, she heard from time to time words of Otto's to the child fitted to excite anger, and even fear. As, for instance, when once he had swung Beatrice so high that the child had been frightened, he had soothed her with, "Don't be afraid, you lucky little thing; the death that's waited for by an heir never comes." The fact that Otto had tied the child securely in her swing was suppressed for the sake of producing a greater effect.

Another time the child had pointed down into the pond, saying, "It looks so pretty down there, Cousin Otto, I wish I could go down."

And Otto had replied, "I would go with you, child; it might be better for both of us."

In her anxiety, Theresa tried to prevent Beatrice from being left alone with Otto, but in vain. Whenever she could the little girl ran to him. How could she heed prohibitions which she did not understand, if he would take her on his horse before him, or catch for her the gay butterfly she longed for, or patiently let her jump down again and again from the edge of the basin of the fountain?

He never thwarted her, and seldom refused her any request, and she gladly dispensed with his caresses, for, like most children, she disliked to be interrupted in her play to be petted and kissed.

Otto intended to go to Berlin in the autumn, and meanwhile he continued his gay student career in Buchdorf after so jovial a fashion that the fathers of the youths who had been the playmates of his childhood cautioned their sons against intercourse with him. He laughed at the dismay excited by his mad pranks in the country, since his dearest friends never swerved in their affection for him. But of course his folly—and he was never guilty of aught save folly—found sterner judges in these country squires than in the society of a town.

The universal disapproval at last had its effect upon Kurt. Doubtful of his ward's true character, he gave heed to Theresa's repeated declarations that nothing would ever come of Otto's studying. Instead of spending so much money fruitlessly, why could not Kurt have him taught the management of an estate under his own or Herr Warne's supervision, and in time buy him a farm of his own, which could not easily be squandered? All this outlay for his university education was only thrown away. She was sincere in her good intentions, and

Kurt did not venture to gainsay her, although he shrank from hinting what he was at last resolved upon. He shut himself up in his study, while Theresa, in what she considered a most skilful fashion, relieved him of a hard task by acquainting Otto with the baron's intentions in a long speech in which these intentions were shown in the light of a well-merited punishment.

He listened, one hand resting upon the back of a chair, with an air of cold indifference that entirely misled the baroness as to the impression produced by her words. Yet when she had finished he had grown so pale that even Theresa was startled.

"Tell my cousin," he answered, steadily, "that the power lies in his hands. I cannot plead. He must answer for this resolve when my father asks at his hands an account of the son committed to his care, and upon his head be the evil consequences sure to follow upon this step. For you, madame, and your share in this affair, I tell you the time will come when you would give years of your life to be able to blot this hour from your conscience. I think there is nothing further to be discussed between us."

Otto left the room. At the dinner-table he appeared in a simple dark dress, every sign of the gay student habiliments laid aside. Kurt, who sat opposite him, did not venture to look at him.

From this time another change was manifest in the young baron, but not the favourable one which the baroness had hoped would follow the execution of her plans. Hitherto the life he had led had been gay; now it was reckless. He laughed his cousin to scorn when he counselled him to pay attention to farming and the management of the affairs of the estate. He spent days and nights on the open moorland, frequenting miserable inns in the surrounding villages. The only being into whose heart he poured out the full measure of indignation and hatred that filled his own was Aunt Bernhar-

dine; to her alone he revealed the despair that possessed him. With those acquaintances, on the contrary, with whom he still kept up intercourse he was as entertaining as ever, although his wit was accompanied by a nervous irritability shown in occasional outbursts of bitterness and self-contempt which made his jests painful to hear. At Buchdorf he was a morose, gloomy misanthrope. When little Beatrice now approached him, he harshly repulsed her. On one occasion, when the child had cried and begged for a quarter of an hour for a blossom hanging just above Otto's head, to reach which he had but to extend his hand, without receiving any attention from him, Theresa's maternal indignation found vent in a few sharp words of remonstrance and reproof. Otto, by way of reply, coldly asked whether his next occupation was to be that of a child's nurse, and slowly walked away.

The blossoms were left upon the bough, and the baroness, who had first not loved, and had then hated the boy, now began to fear him.

One warm day in spring, Otto, pale, irritable, and in that uncomfortable condition sure to be the result of a night spent in revelry, was wandering in the quiet park, just because he could not sleep away the entire day as he would gladly have done. From a distance, little Beatrice came flying towards him, her embroidered dress fluttering, her brown curls waving, and her large eyes sparkling brighter than the diamond in the little golden cross that dangled from her neck.

"Cousin Otto, Cousin Otto!" she cried, breathless, "I am so glad you are come at last. I have been so often to your door; here are some flowers for you,—May-bells and daisies,—see how pretty they are!"

"I know where there are some even prettier," Otto replied, more kindly than usual, for he could never quite bring himself to be harsh when he was alone with the child. "But it is very far from here."

"Where—where is it, Cousin Otto?"

"Near the three oaks, close by the park gates; I am afraid you cannot find it."

"Oh, yes, I can; this is the way. Stay there, and I will bring you a bunch." And the little thing shot off like an arrow.

With an impatient gesture, Otto threw aside among the bushes the flowers he had taken mechanically from her hands, and sauntered on.

He had no suspicion that there had been a witness to this insignificant little scene; but so it was. Concealed among the leafy shrubbery, the steward of the estate, Heinrich Warne, was standing motionless on the velvet grass. He was a young man, only a few years older than the young baron himself, much more developed, and handsomer, although not so distinguished in appearance.

The two were continually compared, and almost always to Otto's disadvantage. The steward's fair hair waved so luxuriantly about his fresh-coloured face, there was so merry a glance in his blue eyes, and such a good-humoured smile played about his full lips, that all were attracted by him. No one had ever heard a quick word from Herr Warne. He had an excuse ready for all shortcomings, went regularly to church every Sunday, and possessed a rare talent for clothing in poetic expressions the fine sentiments that inspired him.

He never stamped about; his tread was so soft and light, even in the heaviest boots, that his approach was not perceived until his presence was manifest. Also, he was always most carefully dressed, almost too carefully for a man whose duty it was to assist in the labour of the peasants under his control. In short, the steward was a young man after Theresa's own heart, and she sincerely regretted that Otto did not resemble him.

If she could have seen him at this moment, the sight would

certainly have surprised her. The stereotyped smile had vanished from his features, and in its place there was an expression of malice which sat ill on the handsome face. Well touched up, the little scene he had just witnessed would add another to the many proofs that the baroness already had of Otto's want of affection for her child. Well touched up, be it understood, for Frau von Arning would never, in spite of her dislike, have lent her ear to any common slander against Otto.

Meanwhile, the young baron walked on through the level waste of moorland. The desolation about him accorded well with his gloomy reveries. He encountered no human being, and he was glad; for the world and mankind were alike distasteful to him this morning. He cursed the fate that fettered him to a place where he had no real friend, and a surmise dawned upon his mind that it might be better to leave Kurt and the baroness in the enjoyment of the money from which they were so unwilling to be parted, to forsake his native land, and begin existence afresh in some distant quarter of the globe. He pursued this thought until physical exhaustion recalled him to reality, and then he flung himself down among the heather. "Perhaps I can find rest here," he muttered, and sought forgetfulness in sleep.

He did, in fact, slumber profoundly until, after the lapse of several hours, a soft step near awakened him. Sitting up, he saw a young gipsy woman approaching. She had the wild, half-savage beauty so characteristic of her race in youth. Dishevelled blue-black hair fell from beneath the gay kerchief wrapped about her head, down upon her shoulders, which were clad in a shabby velvet jacket, and in a striped shawl thrown around her she carried a sleeping boy, about a month old.

Otto sprang up. "Good-day, pretty one!" he cried to the startled new-comer. "Don't be afraid; I am no robber."

"I was only startled, Herr Baron Otto."

"Aha, child,—so you know me! A good reason why you should tell me your name. What is it?"

"Maida, Herr Baron."

"A pretty name. A prophetess, too, I dare swear. Maida, can you tell me my fortune?"

The gipsy nodded, and Otto held out his hand to her, looking down at her with a smile of admiration for her beauty and of incredulity as to her gift of prophecy.

She studied the open palm for a few moments, then raised her eyes from the lines traced there, and said, gravely, "Rejoice, Herr Baron. After great sorrow the best fortune in the world will be yours."

"Poor little Maida. The best fortune in the world is a very vague promise," said Otto. "What do you think it means, child? Money and land, or a tub and content, or——"

"No,—a true and lovely wife."

The young baron laughed aloud. "Diable! you promise more than Venus herself," he exclaimed. "But, my modern Venus of the moor, what shall a modern Paris offer you in reward? I hardly think you would be content only to be adjudged the prize of beauty, which I solemnly declare is yours; therefore receive the more practical homage of our time in return for your classic utterance."

As he spoke, he emptied the contents of his purse into the hand of the astonished gipsy, who, of course, understood nothing of what he had said, but who readily comprehended the chink of silver coin, as she curtsied gratefully to the young baron and went on her way.

He turned towards the neighbouring estate of Harsbye, while Maida walked briskly on over the moor. A few hours afterwards, when twilight had set in, the cry of a child attracted her attention. She turned in the direction whence the sound

proceeded, and found on the ground asleep a little girl about three years old, who had in her sleep uttered the cry she had heard. Greatly amazed, Maida bent down over the little one How came this child, who judging from her appearance must belong to wealthy parents, here on this lonely and desolate spot with the night so close at hand?

Whilst Maida was puzzling over this question, the little girl opened her large black eyes in a wondering gaze, and then tried to stand up, which, however, she could not do, as she was tied hand and foot to two stout bushes growing on the moor.

In vain did Maida try to learn from her who she was, and the name of her parents. The child only cried and complained of hunger. The good-natured gipsy could not leave it here helpless; she gathered it up in her arms, and hurried on with her double burden to the camp of her tribe.

Meanwhile, young Arning sauntered on, foreboding no evil, through Harsbye and Grasort, to the Buchdorf mansion. His astonishment was great to find all there in the wildest confusion. The servants were rushing hither and thither, Kurt was as undecided as usual as to what was to be done, and the baroness was pacing the great hall to and fro, wringing her hands and mourning for "Beatrice, dear, sweet little Beatrice."

Otto was shocked at the strange scene amidst which he found himself. It was some time before he learned, in answer to his repeated questions, that his little cousin had disappeared.

"Well, she will surely be found immediately," he said, quietly. "I'll wager she is hiding somewhere in the house. Beatrice is too little to walk far away."

"Yes, but she might be carried far away," Theresa cried, beside herself. Otto, now that he had come, served as a kind of conductor for her powerless despair.

Otto shrugged his shoulders with an air which showed that he did not consider her responsible at present for her words.

He turned to his cousin. "Since when has the child been missed?"

"About two hours ago."

"And you have searched everywhere, in the house as well as in the park?"

"Everywhere, everywhere!" the baron replied, with a sob. "My poor, dear little girl!"

"Then we must search the fields and the moor outside the park," said Otto. "Follow me, men. We will go first to the moor."

"Otto, Otto, bring me back my child!" Kurt cried, extending his clasped hands towards the young man.

There was a gleam of dark suspicion in his words, but Otto never observed it.

"Most certainly, if I can," he replied, quietly. "Compose yourself, Kurt, she will soon be found."

He went out, never seeing the wild, accusing glance of Theresa's eyes. Taking five servants with him, he carefully and thoroughly searched the strips of moorland bordering closely on the park and leading to the desolate tract on the borders of which he had that afternoon met pretty Maida. But, as he had suspected would be the case, his efforts were vain. The child could not possibly have gone so far from home. Of course she would be found somewhere in the house, and Otto could not in his heart grudge the baroness the fright she had experienced. Firmly convinced that he should find the little one safe and sound in her bed amidst happy parents and congratulating servants, he returned home after several hours of search. It was nearly nine o'clock when he reached Buchdorf, and passing through the empty hall entered the dwelling-room, where he found no one except Justice Ecken, an early friend of his father's.

"You find great confusion here," he said, "and are, as I see, left quite alone. But you know how it is,—the baroness

is quite beside herself when her idol is in question. Of course the treasure is found. Eh?"

"We hoped you would bring your little cousin back with you," the justice replied, with strange gravity.

"I? Excuse me, Herr Ecken, I never dreamed I should do so. I only went to soothe Kurt. In his place, I would have all the barns, cellars, and outhouses searched. It is inconceivable that a child only three years of age should run out upon the moor."

"It may have been carried there," the justice replied, scanning the young man's face keenly.

"You mean by the gipsies camped hereabouts? Well, that would be no great misfortune. They will bring her back to-morrow for a trifle. Times are far too hard to admit of their adding a stolen child to their own lot."

"You treat a grave matter very lightly," Ecken remarked, with a frown.

"Because I do not believe it grave. A murder for pleasure I hold to be an old nurse's tale; so far as I know, Kurt has not an enemy in the world, and who could have any interest in the little creature's life or death?"

"*Its heir!*"

Otto recoiled as if he had stepped upon an adder. A horrible idea flashed upon him.

"What—what do you mean?" he gasped.

"Unhappy youth, you understand me only too well! Do you not know that a noble name does not shield you from suspicion?"

"Can it be that in this matter any suspicion can fall upon me?"

"More than that. An accusation in due form, and attested by a weight of evidence, is made out against you. For your good father's sake, and for that of your misguided youth, I hope to heaven that you may be able to vindicate yourself. But at

present the evidence against you is so important that I must ask you to follow me to the carriage that waits in the court-yard."

"I am a prisoner?"

"Yes. Make no resistance. Those are waiting in the next room whose duty it is to enforce the law."

"And who has dared to accuse me?" cried Otto, with flashing eyes.

"A man, unfortunately, from whose lips the accusation comes with double authority,—your long-suffering relative, Baron von Arning."

"Kurt!" Otto almost shrieked. It was too much for his power of self-control. He staggered and fell, striking his temple against the sharp edge of the tall, old-fashioned secretary. The blood flowed freely, and probably this accidental relief to his overwrought brain saved him from worse consequences.

"Let us go, Herr Ecken," he said, rising, and holding his handkerchief to his wound. "If Kurt von Arning believes me his child's murderer, I have nothing more to say."

Yes, incredible as it was, Kurt was his accuser! Theresa, driven to despair by the loss of her child, by her mistrust of Otto, and the fear of him strengthened by his own thoughtless expressions, had induced her vacillating husband, in his distress and with his mind filled with recently-aroused doubts as to his cousin's character, to accuse Otto of the abduction or murder of little Beatrice. His lengthened absence and the breaking up of the gipsy camp strangely coincided with the disappearance of the little heiress. A maid-servant from Buchdorf had seen Otto at a distance emptying the contents of his purse into a gipsy's hand. Others said they had seen the same gipsy a couple of hours later with a child in her arms. All these reports reached Buchdorf with incredible rapidity, and the police had little difficulty in finding and apprehending Maida, in spite of her frantic resistance. The stolen child, however, had vanished, and was not to be found.

The gipsy, who had a hearing immediately after her arrest, stoutly denied all knowledge of the child. She had the hatred of her race for the legal authorities, and was evidently determined to oppose force with cunning. But when she was carried to the prison at M——, and learned that she would be confined there perhaps two weeks before she was called up for another hearing, her courage forsook her, and she volunteered to confess everything, since she could not find it in her heart, she said, to let the poor little girl starve. She declared that she had not stolen the child, but found her tied hand and foot on the moor, and, in fear of the police, had hidden her in the cellar of a ruined cottage not far from where she had found her. If the parents did not search for her there at once it might be too late.

Search was immediately made, and Theresa, who was herself with the servants upon the spot, did actually find poor Beatrice lying senseless upon the damp floor in the cellar of the deserted cottage, her wrists and ankles frightfully swollen with the cords that bound them, her eyes sunken, her pretty hair all tangled, and without either frock or hat.

She did, indeed, after continued efforts to revive her, slowly open her eyes, but there was no consciousness in them. Neither speech nor memory appeared to return with reawakened life, and Doctor Norden, from M——, gravely shook his head, and pronounced that the child's constitution had received a shock from which it could hardly recover.

The day appointed for Otto's trial arrived. The sun arose fresh and golden above the dewy fields. The air was filled with the glad songs of birds as the persons summoned as witnesses went from Buchdorf to the court-house at M——.

Beneath a spreading beech in the depths of the forest sat Warne, his head in his hand, so lost in thought that a passer-by might have thought him absorbed in contemplation of the beauty of nature, although such an idea was contradicted by a

certain expression of gloom which his features were not wont to wear when in the society of others. In fact, Warne heard nothing of the music in the air or of the rustling of the leafy crown above his head. He it was who had told the baroness that Otto had sent little Beatrice to the park-gates, and he had been summoned to appear to-day as a witness against Herr von Arning. As he sat here, surrounded by all that was lovely and peaceful in nature, he was deciding with burning cheeks but with cool calculation which would be most to his own advantage,—the condemnation or the acquittal of Otto von Arning. The young baron had never been his friend, and was, besides, the only energetic member of the family at Buchdorf. Were he away there would remain only a weak, elderly man, an impulsive, passionate woman, and a sickly, helpless child. The steward arose, and buttoned his light coat across his chest, while an expression of implacable cruelty animated his handsome face.

The birds were silent for a moment, and the breeze lulled, when in the silence was heard the clear shrill cry of the cuckoo,—then a second and a third. The steward started, but soon began to count the reiterations as the children do, "Yes, no, yes, no——" The bird ceased at a "yes." The man smiled coldly, and walked on towards the town.

The court-room was crowded, and the appearance of the accused awakened groans and hisses. Among all those assembled, there was scarcely one who had any doubt of Otto's guilt.

In that country the customs are simple and primitive. The inhabitants are for the most part well-to-do. Robbery and crime are of comparatively rare occurrence. And who except the wild young baron at Buchdorf could have devised a scheme so detestable as the murder of charming little Beatrice? There was nothing of which he was not capable. It had always been easy to see what he would come to. And then

all looked curiously at the three principal actors in the scene: the gipsy, pale, dishevelled, and distraught; and the two cousins, one of whom had brought against the other so terrible an accusation. To look at them, Kurt would have been taken for the accused. He stood like an image of woe,—and no wonder! His only child lay wrestling with death, and his cousin who had once been as a son to him was here arraigned as a criminal. There was little change to be observed in Otto, except that he was paler than usual.

The trial began; but there was little light thrown upon the affair. Maida repeated precisely what she had said shortly after her arrest, that when the police came to search her camp she had been afraid and had hidden the child, meaning to release it when the danger of discovery should be past. She stoutly denied that Otto had employed her to steal the child or that he had ever mentioned the child to her. She had found it on the Harsbye moor, she insisted, and nothing else could be extorted from her.

In fact, when the people from the surrounding villages testified where and when they had seen her pass, it was found impossible that she should have returned to Buchdorf after parting with Otto. But perhaps Von Arning had previously brought the child out upon the moor. Where had he been all the afternoon? No one at Buchdorf had seen him, and was not his own account of himself—that he had been sauntering aimlessly about, and had finally thrown himself on the ground and slept a long time—highly improbable, pleasure-seeker as he was known to be?

Several peasants had also met him on the moor, although he had not noticed them; but no one had seen Beatrice with the accused, nor had the maid from Buchdorf, who told of his giving money to Maida, seen any child consigned to her by him.

The steward repeated the conversation he had overheard,

and testified upon oath that he also heard the accused talking to the child outside the wall of the park. Beatrice had not returned; but he had seen Von Arning enter the park alone, and had noticed something sparkling in his hand. It probably was the cross the child had worn about her neck. This Otto indignantly denied, and no other witness in support of the steward's testimony was forthcoming.

Thus, although the court and all present were wonderfully unanimous in their moral conviction of Otto's guilt, which was clearly established in the minds even of the most skeptical, still the positive proof of his crime demanded and insisted upon by the defence was wanting, and the whole affair continued to be enveloped in mystery.

After a long consultation, the gipsy Maida was, upon her own confession, declared guilty of the abduction of the child Beatrice, and sentenced to a ten years' imprisonment; while Otto, Baron von Arning, was, under the verdict "not proven," set at large.

A wild shriek rang through the court-room when Maida learned the terrible penalty decreed to her for her humanity. Otto bent over the poor wretch, and whispered, compassionately, "Be quiet, Maida, I will take care of you;" but she did not understand him.

And then the young man turned and left the court-room, amid the condemning silence of all present.

One heart in all that assembly had been throbbing in indescribable anguish for him. Two black restless eyes had scanned the judge's face with torturing eagerness all through the trial,—those of Bernhardine von Tretten. And yet, strangely enough, when the disgraceful sentence was pronounced which gave him freedom but did not repair his lost honour, a flash of joy illuminated her features, and she drew a long breath as if a great burden had been removed from her heart. Had she feared a worse fate for her darling?

CHAPTER V.

KURT was not a little astonished when immediately after his return to Buchdorf his cousin presented himself before him.

"Otto!" he cried, in dismay, "how terribly changed, how agitated you look!"

"It is odd that I should look agitated! There certainly is no cause for agitation," the young baron rejoined, with cold contempt, as he opened the door of the dining-room and motioned to Kurt to enter, adding, "I wish to have a short conversation with you."

Kurt entered with some hesitation. "My poor Beatrice is dying," he said, covering his eyes with his hand.

"I am the more sorry to intrude," Otto interrupted him; "but I must speak now, for you surely understand that my foot will not cross your threshold a second time. To business, then! Although by our laws I am not yet of age, I desire to be released from guardianship. You will have the kindness to see that the papers are made out, and sent in the course of a week to M——, to Fräulein von Tretten."

"You want to be released from guardianship?"

"Out of consideration for you. I would not have you play overseer to a man '*suspect*,' released from prison on a mere quibble. It is disgrace enough for you that you bear his name!"

"But, Otto, I entreat you, let me tell you——"

"I will be free!" Otto cried, bringing down the butt of his riding-whip savagely upon the heavy oaken table. "Do you understand? Free—free from your guardianship! And if you will not release me voluntarily, I will force you to it. A legal process has no terrors for me now!"

"But what do you propose to do?"

"Farm Ermsdal."

Kurt stared at the young man as if he thought him insane. He would as soon have supposed it possible to farm Sahara as the marshy estate of Ermsdal.

"Listen to reason," he said, at last. "The estate is in a terrible condition, the castle is in ruins, the soil will never pay for tilling it. There are neither cattle nor labourers there. Indeed you will perish of want if you attempt to carry out your crazy scheme."

"That is my affair. I came here to rid myself of your counsel, not to ask it."

"Once more, Otto, listen," the old baron began, without looking at the man who had so long been as a child to him. "I will give you Grasort. Consider it your own,—farm it,—do what you like with it. It is as retired a place as Ermsdal, and will yield you a good income. Be ruled by reason, and take it."

"From you? Not if it were a crust to keep me from starvation! Let there be an end to all this. Will you have the papers made out or not?"

"I will order them executed, if you insist upon it."

"Very well; I shall expect to receive them within a week at the farthest." And without saying farewell, Otto left the room and the house.

They never met again.

Some days after this, Aunt Bernhardine was walking to and fro restlessly in her little sitting-room in M——.

She still wore the black woollen dress and the spotless collar and cuffs in which we saw her first, four years before; but the time since had not passed her by without leaving traces of its flight. There was many a silver thread in the smooth black hair, and the intensely piercing eyes were sunk deep in their sockets.

The coffee-urn was hissing comfortably, but Aunt Bernhardine, thorough old maid though she was, did not appear to need her cup of coffee.

Upon her carefully arranged work-table lay the papers sent her that morning by Baron Kurt, declaring Otto legally of age; but her nephew she had not seen or heard of since his dismissal, and she began to dread the worst.

Depressed and anxious, she went to the window and looked out into the early morning. The milkmaids were hurrying about the streets with their milk-cans, a baker's boy was leaving bread at a neighboring house; there was no other sign of life stirring; most of the shops even were still closed.

Suddenly the door of the room was thrown open, and before Aunt Bernhardine's startled eyes stood the nephew of whom she had been thinking so sadly. But what a spectacle he presented! The canoness scarcely recognized him. His clothes hung about him, disordered,—his hair was matted with blood from the re-opened wound on his temple. His haggard features showed his utter exhaustion,—despair looked from his gleaming eyes.

"Otto," his aunt cried, rapturously, hastening towards him. "Thank God, you are here once more! Thank God!"

He sank down wearily upon the chair by the window.

"You thought there was nothing left for me but to put a bullet through my brains?" he said, pressing his hot forehead against the cool glass pane. "I think I once said something of the kind to you. But I did not stand in court by any fault of mine, and just now I am really interested in finding out how much a human being can endure without going mad."

Fräulein von Tretten stood before her nephew mute and trembling. She seemed scarcely able to endure the sight of the devastation wrought in her darling by the events of the last few weeks.

"You must be yourself again, Otto," she suddenly gasped

"or else—— If you had laid hands on your own life, I——" She could not proceed; she controlled herself by a strong effort, but her lips refused to utter the words of consolation she would fain have spoken. She could only ask, in a low, faint tone, "Where have you been, Otto, while I have so suffered from anxiety about you?"

"I searched out Maida's people, and last night made an attempt with her father to release his child. Oh, no fear," he added, in reply to the old canoness's horrified glance. "The overseer of the prison when he makes his rounds this morning will find her still in her cell."

"Your attempt failed, then?"

"No. The gipsy knew one of the turnkeys, whom we bribed. I sold my watch and chain; it was just enough. The man opened a side door for us last night, and we found the way to her cell."

"Well?" Aunt Bernhardine asked, eagerly, as Otto paused and gazed stolidly out of the window.

"Maida lay upon her cot, dead,—already cold. A child of the forest and field cannot long endure prison walls!"

"It is well for her, Otto; do not let it distress you so," Aunt Bernhardine at last found words to say, soothingly. "After all, what is it? A gipsy more or less! And it is what we all must come to."

Otto sprang up. "Oh, God!" he murmured, pressing his hand to his forehead. "Gone, gone! And she might still have enjoyed her freedom. Life would have been a precious gift to her, while I—— A condemned murderer is far happier: death must soon release him."

Meanwhile, Aunt Bernhardine had begun to prepare the coffee. Her face was very pale, and there was a shy terror in her glance as she looked at her nephew, which must have struck him if he had not been so absorbed by his own hard fate. She had not taken his hand, she scarcely ventured

to meet his eye, and now when she attempted to fill his coffee-cup her hand trembled so that some drops were spilled upon the spotless table-cover.

"You must live,—you must still enjoy your life," she said, with the energy of despair. "The present is horrible, Otto, but the future is your own; cling to that. At all events, you are acquitted," she added, in an undertone, with a sigh of relief.

Otto stopped pacing to and fro in the room. "Acquitted?" he repeated. "Do you know what 'not proven' means? Do not speak! not a word! or I shall go mad! Tell me, Aunt Bernhardine, do you know of one single act in all my life that could give them a right to believe me capable of such a crime? Has my past been a murderer's past? A murderer's? Why, that is nothing! A man may murder and still be honest. Many a murderer shines in history as a hero! But, look you, this it is: the murder—oh, there are no words in which to tell it!—the murder of a baby girl, a little creature who never injured me, who ran to me with delight whenever she saw me, to cling to my hand with a caress; the murder of a child of the man who was father, brother to me; why, I had carried her in my arms a hundred times—'tis too much, too much! There is not a common felon in existence who may not raise his hand to heaven and thank God that he is not what they would stamp me!"

He stopped and burst into tears. It was the first time since his childhood that Aunt Bernhardine had seen her nephew weep.

She sat upright and stiff in her arm-chair, listening to his outburst of despair, without interrupting it by a single syllable. The tremor, as if from a fever-fit, that agitated her strongly-knit frame seemed, in one of her strength of character, almost too violent to be the effect of mere compassion, even although the being thus pitied were dearer to her than aught else on earth. Once or twice her parched lips opened, but no sound issued from them, and several minutes elapsed

before she mastered her weakness. Then, however, the conquest was complete. With the accustomed expression of gloomy resolve upon her quiet face, she arose, went to Otto, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Do not be unjust to your fate, Otto," she said, with singular emphasis. "With all the agony these last weeks have brought you, they have yet made you lord of Buchdorf. The child is in a hopeless condition."

Otto thrust aside her hand, almost with aversion.

"Oh, horrible! Aunt Bernhardine!" he gasped. "Can a blood-stained inheritance atone for my lost honour? Never, never would I accept it!"

The canoness looked keenly and scrutinizingly in his face for an instant, then turned away with a shrug.

"I did not think you so sentimental," she said, with a scornful smile. "After this wise determination on your part, I am curious to know what are your plans for the future."

The entrance of a servant interrupted the interview.

"Fräulein von Tretten, the Jew is here again, and will not go away. He says he must have the money to-day, or the Herr Baron——"

At a sign from her mistress she stopped short. But it was too late. Just as the servant, with a start, perceived who was present, Otto advanced.

"You have debts?" he asked, quietly.

"Yes,—no,—a few purchases; nothing more." Aunt Bernhardine was embarrassed,—a rare condition of mind for her.

Otto suspected the truth. He had contracted a certain amount of debt in his gay career, and had carried his exhausted credit to the usurers, to whom, of course, he was obliged to pay a high rate of interest. "It was like you," he said, "to try to relieve me in secret. But we must have an end to such

generosity which you can ill afford. Show the Jew into another room," he said to the servant, "and I will see him immediately."

"For heaven's sake, do not," Aunt Bernhardine entreated. "He must not see you here. Let me speak with him. Perhaps I can——"

"No, no, I certainly do not intend to ruin you. Let me beg of you, once for all, not to interfere in this matter."

The tone in which these words were spoken forbade all contradiction. Bernhardine was silent, while the young baron brushed aside the hair from his eyes, and, slightly rearranging his dress, went into an adjoining room, where the Jew awaited him.

The man was dwarfish in stature and unclean in attire. His grizzled hair hung over his forehead. He had a hooked nose and small cunning eyes. After the fashion of his kind in the country and at the time of which I write, he stood against the wall as near as possible to the door. It did not often fall to his lot to be admitted to the private apartments of his creditors, and indeed, since Lieutenant von A., of the hussars, had forced him, with a pistol at his ear, to swallow his own note of hand, he had avoided such places as far as possible.

He started involuntarily, in a kind of terror, when, instead of meeting the canoness, he found himself confronted with the young baron, whom he had long sought in vain.

Otto saw the movement, and the ghost of a smile hovered about his lips.

"Good-morning, Aaron," he said, motioning towards a chair; a courtesy to which the Jew responded by edging still nearer the door. "What are you afraid of? you must have expected me."

"Oh, certainly; of course I expected the Herr Baron,—of course. Do I not know that the Herr Baron would never deceive a poor man and the father of a family? When evil

men told me that the Herr Baron was gone far away across the water,—what will not such evil men say?—I told them, 'The Herr Baron is not gone, for the Herr Baron never would deceive a poor Jew.'"

"No, I will not deceive you. You come about your money?"

"Yes, Herr Baron, about the small sum, you remember," Aaron hastily replied, approaching Otto and taking a paper from his pocket. "It is a little over the time, but no matter for that. The Herr Baron will pay the interest for the few extra days—only a small matter between old acquaintances."

"That's all very fine; but I have no money."

"No matter, no matter. If the Herr Baron has no money, Baron Kurt will pay, or the mam'selle aunt."

"You are mistaken, Aaron. Fräulein von Tretten *can* not, and my cousin will not, *shall* not, after what has passed."

"But," asked the usurer, growing anxious, "how then shall I get my money? I must have my money."

Otto shrugged his shoulders. "I possess nothing in the world save the clothes I wear; not even a watch and chain. Ermsdal, upon the possession of which I have just entered, is, as you know, an entailed estate. It cannot be sold, and, even if it could, it would not suffice to pay my debts."

"I am robbed!" cried Aaron, seizing his head between his hands. "My money, my precious money, has gone! But it shall not be. I will go to the lawyers; they will not see a poor man robbed. And I will not spare the Herr Baron. He shall repent deceiving the poor Jew."

"You would do all that, of course, if you could," Otto said, coolly. "Fortunately, you cannot."

"Cannot! And why not?"

"For the simple reason that when I signed the paper you have there I was under age. In a court of justice that signature is not worth the paper upon which it is written."

"Oh, God of Abraham!" cried Aaron. "I am a ruined man if this be so."

"Go examine the certificate of my baptism to convince you," Otto coolly rejoined. "You do not attach much importance to baptism, it is true, but I know you have an eye for dates and figures."

"Did I not see the Herr Baron's birth set down in the fine book, small and thick, all bound in silver and gold, the day when——"

"I took advantage then of a misprint," Otto interrupted him, "which made me a year older than I am."

"Fool, fool that I was!" cried Aaron, in an agony of terror and dismay. "But how can a nobleman so abuse the confidence of an honest Israelite as to give him worthless paper for good money. What is it to be a nobleman? You are none; you are——"

"Hold!" Otto haughtily interrupted him. "Don't speak of what you can't understand. I signed the paper to satisfy you; for me, for any man of honour, a written promise was not necessary. It does not bind me, nor will it prevent me from keeping my word and paying what I owe. Tear up the paper, burn it, swallow it if you choose; your appetite has been known to be capricious sometimes. I shall, notwithstanding, pay you what I owe you."

"With interest?" Aaron asked, relieved.

"With interest, simple and compound, as soon as I can. You must help me to do so. Instead of exhausting yourself in empty threats and abuse, lend me another thousand thalers for at least three years. At the end of that time I hope to pay you both capital and interest. No—hear me to the end," he went on, hurriedly, as the Jew was about to object. "I have been declared legally of age, and my signature now is valid. I am about to undertake to farm Ermsdal. The soil there was not always as worthless as it seems to-day. It has been ex-

hausted, and when it ceased to yield crops its possessors deserted and forsook it. I know the estate is at present a desert, and it will cost both time and labour to repair the neglect of years; still it is not impossible. Farming-tools must be procured and cattle purchased. I must dig ditches and drains, and repair and build stalls and outhouses. You see a thousand thalers is little enough for my purpose, and that I could easily spend that sum four or five times told, but I ask only what I am certain I can repay in three years' time. Once again, then, Aaron, give me means and time to work, and I will repay you to the uttermost farthing."

While Otto spoke, the old usurer's small eyes had keenly scanned the young man's face. He knew mankind, had had to do with men of all ranks, trades, and professions, and this was by no means the first ruined lordling he had confronted. How often he had heard the words, "My good Aaron, only give me time! My uncle, or my father, or my friend, will surely come to my aid." But for the first time in his life he now heard a Herr Baron plead, "Give me time and I will work."

Various thoughts and considerations were busy in the Jew's brain. Young Arning's courage in facing the worst greatly impressed him. And then, although few believed it, a human heart was beating in his breast; not indeed that there was any pity there for those who when rich and happy despised and mocked him to whom they crouched servilely in their misfortune, but Otto had never insulted him. He had had a liking for the gay frank student, and the change that had come over the young man since the trial did not escape his penetration. He knew what disgrace and humiliation were. Had he not felt their stings? And is there a wretch on earth who can endure scorn with genuine indifference?

"My proposal requires time for consideration," Otto began again, as the usurer kept silence. "So be it! Give me an answer

to-morrow. But reflect that it will not be wise to drive me to extremities. I do not set much value on my life at present, and if you should add to its worthlessness—why, I had best throw it away, and you can take possession of whatever effects I leave behind me."

This last threat settled the matter,—but not this alone, let us do the old usurer the justice to admit; mingled with the baser selfish motive there was a certain amount of compassion for Otto's misfortunes, and of confidence in his integrity.

"God of Abraham, what injustice the Herr Baron does the poor Jew!" he said, humbly. "I was silent only from surprise. The Herr Baron shall have the thousand thalers, and the God of my fathers send him a blessing with the money! Did I not always do what I could for the Herr Baron? And he will not deceive the poor man who loves him, and who has a wife and six children——"

"No, Aaron, I will not," Otto von Arning made answer, offering his hand to the Jew, "and I will be grateful to you as long as I live."

The next day Otto went alone and on foot to Ermsdal, with which he was by no means familiar, so infrequent had been his previous visits to the estate. The inhabitants of the village, and the various tenantry, might be seen in sorrowful consultation here and there, on the roads, in the fields. They knew that their master was about to take up his abode among them, and they were not at all charmed with the prospect. The Arnings had been a haughty, self-willed race, regarding their lands and tenantry simply as means of income, and what could be expected of the wild young Baron Otto, whom they had once or twice seen galloping madly past their dwellings? What good could they ever gain from a master who had but just escaped the gallows?

It was no rose-strewn path by which Otto thus entered his future home, along roads bordered on either side by marshy,

sterile meadows, where, instead of waving grain, only the coarse marsh-grass was to be seen; past peasants who all regarded him with gloomy looks of mistrust, and who scarcely returned a sullen acknowledgment of his greeting; past straw-thatched mud huts, the abodes of sordid want,—to his goal, the castle. The castle? No, the ruin. In the stagnant waters of the ditch lay whatever of the huge old structure the flames had spared, except those stones with which the peasants had repaired their miserable dwellings. One massive tower was still standing, and three walls of a mediæval hall to which the roof was wanting.

The Ermsdalers had supposed that their lord would instantly proceed to erect a smart abode for himself; they were greatly mistaken. All that Arning did was to provide the tower with a rough wooden staircase, and to rebuild a fourth wall to the old hall and provide it with a thatched roof. The débris of the old castle was employed to fill up the fosse, and then the young baron, to the disapproving amazement of his tenants, took up his abode in the ruin. He appropriated to himself the hall and the ground-floor of the tower. The furniture consisted of a couple of wooden tables and chairs of most primitive construction, and a camp bedstead. In the second story of the tower he installed as housekeeper an old woman from the village, who prepared his frugal meals for him in a small room adjoining the hall.

CHAPTER VI.

SIX more years had passed by. The straw thatched abode of the lord of Ermsdal had been replaced by no more commodious dwelling, nor were its master's surroundings one whit more luxurious. But in the village the flower of prosperity, nipped by a lengthened frost, had begun slowly to put forth fresh buds. To make this possible had cost an amount of thought, care, and industry of which the disheartened Ermsdal peasantry had had no conception, but Otto von Arning had conquered. In the third summer the first scanty harvest was reaped from the marshy meadows. The estate could not yet be accounted of value, but it was in a fair way to become so.

In the country round, this change, effected by the young baron without experience and almost without means, was regarded as little short of a miracle, and many a neighbour who had once warned his sons against "wild young Arning" would now gladly have made friends with him. But no success attended any effort to this end.

Otto carried his misanthropy to the verge, and even beyond it, of discourtesy. Although he was among his labourers from morning until night, superintending and sharing in their toil, he had broken off all intercourse with his equals, and not one of his neighbours could boast that he had ever been invited beneath the lord of Ermsdal's straw-thatched roof.

The Ermsdal peasantry had at first made their master's task no easy one. The tightening of the reins of government which they expected had of course ensued; they were obliged to work regularly, and Otto was not disposed to overlook the transgression when his permission to collect fagots was taken

advantage of to break off boughs from the young trees. They looked with defiance and mistrust upon the master who was bent upon reforming their sluggish lives, and many a one would, if he had dared, have thrown out malicious hints as to the suspicion clouding Otto's past. But any such word died upon the lips that would have uttered it, at sight of the grave, piercing glance, the quiet, serious features, of the young baron.

Afterwards, when the hated reforms had produced blessed results, when a prosperity long vanished again made its appearance in the village, and the lord of the land, instead of extorting from them the hard price of the sweat of their brows for his own use, embraced every possible means to secure their comfort and welfare, the reaction set in, and the Ermsdaler who would once have snatched his child from Otto's path as if it were his habit to murder children as he snapped off the tops of the weeds with his stick, would now have laid his life that his master was innocent of the abduction of his cousin, and would as gladly have spoken out his devotion in words, as formerly his dislike, had not Arning's cold, measured demeanor forbidden the expression alike of love and of hatred.

Everything had gone on quietly also at Buchdorf during these years. Beatrice was still living, to the astonishment of physicians, and of all who saw her. Contrary to old Norden's expectations she had not succumbed to the disease of the brain that had threatened her life six years before. But since then she had been continually ailing; the shock had been too much for her tender constitution. She grew daily paler and feebler, and her poor parents saw their darling fading away as it were without the power to aid or relieve her. In the last two years her illness had greatly increased. She daily ate less, and grew feebler. Of late Norden had forbidden all exercise, and now she was constantly confined to the house for weeks at a time.

Every one on the estate loved the little invalid; as she

drove through the village in the grand family coach the Buchdorfers would look with compassionate curiosity at the lovely pale face, with the gentle brown eyes, lying back among the cushions or in her anxious father's arms, and then, thinking of their own blooming children, would sadly shake their heads. There was not a father in Buchdorf who would have exchanged lots with the wealthy lord of the soil.

But there was a gay and life-loving spirit in the frail little body. In Beatrice's disposition there was no trace of the touching resignation and gentleness which so often seem to irradiate as with the dawn of another world those destined to an early death. She was not ill-tempered, but as quick, self-willed, and impatient as the healthiest of children, giving at times by her waywardness a world of trouble to her mother and Fräulein Normann, her governess.

Meanwhile, the powerful frame of the old baron was making rapid strides towards the grave. Doctor Norden pronounced his disease an affection of the heart: it was indeed an affection of the heart, but not all physical.

The gentle, loving spirit of the old man was perpetually tortured on the one hand by the fading away of his little darling, and on the other by a scarcely less wearing anxiety with regard to Otto, the boy whose place in his affection neither wife nor child could fill.

"Was he guilty, or innocent?" This was the agonizing thought that filled the baron's feverish brain through many a sleepless, weary night, and the more vividly he called up his cousin's image, the more firm became his conviction of the impossibility of his guilt—of his entire innocence!

In the first winter after their separation, when his friends had told Kurt of the destitute poverty of Otto's manner of life, the old baron had enclosed a thousand thalers in bank notes in a kindly letter to the young man, not only begging him to accept this gift, but also placing at his disposal any sum he

might have need of. The letter was returned to him from Ermsdal unopened, and since then there had been no intercourse between the cousins. Kurt never mentioned Otto's name; he would not allow Theresa to pronounce it in his presence; but he, once so gay and social in his habits, would sit alone for hours at a time, lost in gloomy reverie, brooding over the past in vain regret for his over-hasty act. He no longer attempted a reconciliation, he knew Otto too well to suppose it possible. But remorse, and anxiety for his child, were wearing away his life.

When a wealthy man is ill past all hope, his physician always sends him to some watering-place, where at least he is no longer responsible for him. Kurt von Arning was ordered first to a German Bad and then to Italy. It did him no good, however, and when after a few months he became convinced that his death was near at hand, he wrote home two letters, one to his wife and one to his cousin.

He entreated the baroness to place the crown upon the affection which had blessed him since his marriage by coming to him immediately, that his dying eyes might be closed by a loving hand. The care of his estates and of Beatrice he would intrust to his cousin Otto, to whom he owed this proof of confidence, in atonement for the past.

With a heavy heart Theresa prepared to obey his request. If she could have consulted her own wishes she certainly never would have left the child, dearer to her than all the world beside, defenceless in the power of her mortal enemy; but she was strong and stern of soul, and the conflict between duty and desire was soon decided. Whatever longing for rest and shelter in a world that had been but a forlorn home for her had induced her to marry a man so much her elder, her place now certainly was beside her dying husband. She would go to Italy, even although her heart should break in so doing.

Otto's letter had also arrived at its destination

The messenger who brought it was directed by a village child to the old tower, where he arrived on a rainy evening in April, and which he never could have suspected to be the dwelling-place of a kinsman of the wealthy lord of Buchdorf.

It was a wild night; the rain fell in torrents, and the blasts of wind howled and whistled about the ruinous tower; but there was a fiercer tempest raging in young Arning's breast, as, with folded arms, he paced his old hall restlessly to and fro.

The rough-hewn walls, whose only decoration consisted of fowling-pieces and implements of the chase, gleamed bare and bleak in the dim light of a single student-lamp, which stood on the rough unpolished oaken table and shed a vague twilight through the spacious apartment. Besides this table, the room contained only two chairs, and a rude book-case filled with medical and legal works; for Otto had pursued with ardour the studies begun at the university, and the Ermsdalers looked to their master as their only physician.

The hall echoed eerily with the man's tread, and the dog was whining for admission outside the heavy oaken door, but Otto did not hear him; his thoughts were far, far away, in Italy, by the bedside of his dying kinsman. Beside the lamp lay Kurt's letter, so humble and touching an entreaty for forgiveness that even the chilled heart of the young baron was moved by it.

"I leave in your charge my child and my estates," he wrote. "You cannot refuse me this service; for, look you, Otto, it is the only way in which I can testify to the world my absolute confidence in you, and my remorse for the grievous wrong I did you in my inconceivable blindness and hastiness. I pray you do not say no; and although we have so deeply sinned against you, forgive my poor Theresa, and forgive me, who am by far the guiltier; for I knew you much better than she did, and yet I could doubt you. Forgive, forgive, Otto! I think

I could not rest in my grave if I thought your hatred would follow me thither."

For an hour or more the young baron continued silently to pace to and fro; then he raised his head, and although a bitter smile hovered upon his lips, the fire of a good resolve shone in his eyes.

"Dora!" he called up the tower staircase.

"Herr Baron!" and an old woman made her appearance.

"I wished to tell you that you can pay your niece the visit you have promised her. On the day after to-morrow I am going to Buchdorf, and I cannot say how long I shall be absent."

On the afternoon of the appointed day he went, thinking that the baroness would have departed the day before or in the early morning, and that he should thus avoid meeting her. He was mistaken. The baroness, with Beatrice by her side, was awaiting him. She was still the proud, beautiful woman of ten years before, and her dark travelling dress became her admirably. Beatrice had been dressed with great care for this interview, quite too richly for her age; but Theresa, with all her taste in other respects, could not refrain from tricking out her darling in whatever was most rich and costly. Thus the little damsel wore to-day an embroidered dress of blue silk, and was guarded against the cold by a mantle of black velvet, trimmed with lace, not to mention diamond ear-rings, bracelets, rings, etc.

Beatrice was not short for her age, although slender and frail, like a plant too rapidly developed. Her face was exquisitely lovely, but small and thin, and of a startling pallor, which was heightened by the contrast of her dark curls and black velvet mantle. The childish face showed life and colour only in the wonderful brown eyes, her mother's eyes, but more expressive and less proud; in the pale, thin face they looked unnaturally large.

"You have received my poor husband's letter?" the baroness began, after cool greetings had been exchanged. "And I thank you from my heart that you are come to fulfil the last desire of a dying man. I can assure you that the unfortunate estrangement that separated us years ago has caused him many a bitter hour, as it has myself. But—we will not dwell upon the past; you are in Buchdorf once more, you are reconciled to your cousin, and I have en to express the desire that all may be forgotten between us also."

Theresa had a decided talent for dramatic representation. As she uttered these words she was every inch a princess; and she never could have forced her haughty soul to speak them, never would have declared that she could either forget or forgive the abduction of her child (of which she still in her heart believed Otto guilty), had she not known that Beatrice was to be entirely in his power for some time to come. She thought that she had humbled herself in the dust; but the young baron took an entirely different view of her words.

How dared she talk of forgetting?—she who had annihilated his hopes and burdened his life with disgrace? What had this woman to forget towards him?

But a solitude of six years teaches silence. He said nothing, only lightly touched the hand extended to him, and bowed gravely. But the frown deepened upon his brow, and Theresa's keen eyes could discover no sign of forgiveness in her foe's gloomy glance.

In a more uncertain tone she asked, "And what message shall I carry to Kurt from you? I know how anxiously he is expecting a word of comfort."

"I have written to him, madame. He will probably receive my letter simultaneously with your arrival."

The baroness shivered. Her kinsman's icy manner seemed actually to diffuse a chill through the air.

"Then there is nothing more for me to do, except to hand

over my Beatrice to you. Take care of the child, Otto, and be sure we are already your debtors for every kindness you may show her. Speak to your cousin, Beatrice."

The child looked up frankly into the young man's face; then kissing his hand as she had been wont to do by her father, she said, in her clear, childish voice, "Only try me, Cousin Otto; you will see how good I can be."

The baroness gave a sigh of relief. The little girl could not have said anything sweeter. And she was usually so shy with strangers, and had sometimes confused her mother by loudly expressing in their presence her dislike of them.

Her cousin's grave face seemed to have impressed her. "Thank God," Theresa said to herself, thinking, as many a mother will, her darling irresistible, "if she takes to him he cannot but love her."

At present, however, there were no signs of so desirable an effect. The young man glanced coldly towards the charming child, and extricating his hand, though not ungently, from her clasp, he turned to the baroness.

"You allude, madame, to the only one of my cousin's arrangements to which I do not willingly conform," he said, quietly. "I think it would be better for all if you would consent to leave Beatrice with her governess in lodgings in M——."

"I cannot," Theresa in terror interrupted him. "She could not bear the change. Doctor Norden says the country air is the best tonic she can have. Oh, accept the charge of her, Otto,—indeed it will be no burden to you. On the contrary, you will love her. Every one loves my little Beatrice."

Otto made a deprecatory gesture. "It is not the burden that I fear," he said, coldly; "I shall scarcely see the child, since the charge of such large estates will not, of course, give me time for much personal intercourse with her. You have a trustworthy governess. But you know Beatrice is very, very

weak. The catastrophe which you dread may occur soon, and I would gladly avoid all responsibility in the matter. I have endured so much on account of this child that you can readily comprehend my desire to avoid any repetition of such suffering."

Theresa sank, sobbing, on a lounge. Although she knew her child was doomed, she had never before heard her death so plainly, nay, roughly alluded to. But the suppressed hatred of six years made Otto pitiless; at this moment the baroness might have died at his feet and he would not have lifted a finger to save her. He continued, composedly:

"Therefore I can consent to remain beneath the same roof with Beatrice only upon condition, madame, that you promise to hold me free from all responsibility, whatever may occur, even although circumstances combine against me. Will you promise this?"

Theresa sprang to her feet in wild distress. All her self-possession, all prudential considerations, vanished; not the Baroness von Arning, but a mother desperate with fear for her child, confronted the young man.

"I must, I must!" she cried. "But, Otto, Otto, for your soul's sake, spare my child. Whatever we may have done, however you may hate us, do not wreak your revenge upon Beatrice; have pity upon her. She is all I have in the world! You do not know how beggared I shall be if she is taken from me. How can I touch your heart?"

"No more, madame," Otto interrupted her, proudly and sternly, retreating a step as she advanced. "The life of your child is in God's hand! Remember that every entreaty for its preservation addressed to me is an insult."

"God protect you, then, my poor darling!" the baroness groaned, as she bent over her child and pressed her hot lips to its forehead.

"Otto! Otto!" she exclaimed once again, as she stood erect

before him. "Take pity upon me! Give me one word of comfort!"

In her pale beauty she was a touching sight, but he did not once look towards her; he had stepped to the window. "The coach is at the door, madame," he said, coldly. "Permit me to conduct you to it."

Theresa once more clasped little Beatrice to her heart with passionate tenderness, and then took Otto's offered arm.

"My child!" she said, imploringly, looking in his face with eyes that might have melted a stone, but which produced no effect upon the young man.

"Let me entreat you to be calm," he replied, and the baroness entered the carriage and was driven swiftly from the court-yard.

She saw Otto turn into the house, leaving little Beatrice waving her hand in the doorway, and then she buried her face in the cushions of the carriage and burst into tears.

"A time will come when you would give years of your life to blot the memory of this hour from your conscience," Otto had said to her six years before, when she had prevented his pursuing his university career. The time had come. Not years only, but her life itself she would gladly have resigned could she have recalled the words then spoken,—words that perhaps condemned her child to death.

CHAPTER VII.

SOME weeks elapsed, and Otto had in fact seen little Beatrice but seldom. She pursued her usual course of life under Fräulein Normann's supervision, and he had enough to occupy him in the management of the estates.

On a gray rainy day in May, Aunt Bernhardine came to Buchdorf to pay her nephew a visit. She had not seen the place for ten years, and, having declared that she never again would accept from Kurt the hospitality of a night beneath his roof, she was true to her resolve in his absence. Her carriage waited for her, and, when she had said all that she wished to her nephew, they walked together to the gate of the park, sauntering slowly along the broad avenue. When one has not seen a place for ten years there are many notable changes to be observed.

"How tall that shrubbery is!" Aunt Bernhardine remarked, pointing to some young trees on her left. "The trees nearly overshadow the pathway, and in my time they did not exist. Ah! whom have we here?" she interrupted herself, as a childish figure appeared in the pathway she had indicated.

It was Beatrice, dressed to-day in a brown velvet dress, her head carefully tied up in a blue embroidered hood. She was walking more quickly than usual, the end of the little India shawl, that she wore in addition to her warm dress, dragging unheeded in the mud behind her.

"Good-morning, Cousin Otto," she said, standing breathless before the young baron, and making at the same time her little curtsy to the canoness.

"You are alone," Otto remarked.

"Oh, I ran away from Fräulein Normann. I cannot bear

the stale biscuit and wheat bread she gives me for breakfast and supper! And the medicine for my cough is disgusting! They say there is wine in it; but why can't I have real wine? I'd far rather have the cough than take it! I tell Fräulein Normann that I want brown bread, like what other children eat, and she says I am too ill to have it. Well then, I am too ill to copy those hateful pot-hooks!"

"Hey, Otto, had we not better turn back and take Fräulein Normann to task because she has not let the poppet do as she pleases?" the canoness asked, with a sneer, after a scrutinizing look into the emaciated face.

Beatrice took her words in all seriousness. "No, you must not scold Fräulein Normann," she said, hastily, and a flush rose to the pale cheek. "I will not have that! The tears come in her eyes when she is scolded, and that must not be; but, for all that, I will not eat her old biscuits!"

As she ended this decided and logical declaration the child drew the shawl around her, and went on along the pathway with a weary, dragging gait.

The eyes of both aunt and nephew followed her. In Aunt Bernhardine's glance there was an evil look of triumph, and her lip curled scornfully, as she said to Otto,—

"And that frail, wayward little creature, with consumption in every look and gesture, is all that stands between you and Buchdorf?"

"You are mistaken," the baron gravely replied; "Beatrice is not consumptive."

"How do you know that?"

"I have examined her," was the reply.

"Indeed!" Aunt Bernhardine looked at her nephew as if to read his very soul. "And what s the result of your examination?"

"That she has no organic disease. Doctor Norden has entirely misunderstood her case. The child's constitution is

weak, and instead of employing fresh air and exercise to strengthen it she is prohibited either. Her brain, too, is daily crammed with stuff exciting enough to affect the nerves of a really healthy child. It is not yet too late, if the baroness could only bring herself to depart from the system prescribed by Norden; but two years more of it will make the evil irremediable, and the child will die."

Aunt Bernhardine had listened with eager attention to this explanation; she now burst into a laugh so harsh and unmusical that two ravens in the boughs of the tree beneath which she was walking flew away in terror.

"Capital!" she cried; "and thus the child's ruin is Theresa's own work! Your best friend could not do more to further your interests."

Otto made no reply. The look of annoyance and disgust that came into his eyes as Fräulein von Tretten spoke was still there when his aunt had driven off and he was slowly returning through the shady avenue. Without looking to the right or the left, he was walking along beside a narrow stream, when a voice from the other bank disturbed his reverie.

"I want to go home with you, Cousin Otto, but how shall I cross the brook?"

"There is a bridge a little way back."

"Will you wait for me?"

"No, child."

"Oh, then, help me over! Do, Cousin Otto!"

Otto had gone on a few steps. "I have no time," he replied, walking on.

"How shall I get across, then?" Beatrice called, almost crying.

"Why, jump across."

"But mamma says the jolt will make my head ache, and then if I get my shoes wet——"

"You can put on dry ones."

"Yes, but I shall be sick, mamma says—— Oh, I do so want to go with you, Cousin Otto!" and now the tears really filled her eyes.

Otto shrugged his shoulders. "I cannot help you," he said, indifferently, proceeding on his way. An instant afterwards he heard a clumsy jump and scramble, and Beatrice came hurrying after him.

"Here I am, Cousin Otto," she cried, radiant with joy, "and my shoes are not wet in the least. May I go with you now?"

"If you choose."

He walked on at his customary rapid pace, which it was of course impossible for Beatrice to keep up with. Still he paid no heed, perhaps did not hear the labouring gasps that issued from the poor little lungs, until the child said, timidly,—

"Wait for me just a little, little minute, Cousin Otto. I am so sorry I cannot run like the other children."

Otto looked down into the pleading face, and could not but feel the charm of the lovely eyes. He smiled, and slackened his pace to match her own.

She instantly slipped her hand confidingly into his, and chattered on: "I do wish I could run, and I don't think it would do me any harm to try. You know, Cousin Otto, I watch the children playing on the village green, and while Fräulein Normann tells me about the gods and goddesses, and how the Greeks fought for Troy,—and she tells me that story very often, for fear I should forget it,—I look out at the children and think how much nicer it would be to play it all than just to listen. I know the village children would play it with me, if I asked them. Don't you think they would, cousin?"

Otto scarcely replied, but Beatrice rattled on until they reached the house.

The next day, at supper-time, Otto was passing the little baroness's nursery door, which stood ajar. He heard a sound

of childish weeping, interrupted by reproof and a constant repetition of the same phrase in Fräulein Normann's rather monotonous voice.

"What is the matter here?" he asked, entering the room.

Beatrice smiled at him through her tears, while Fräulein Normann explained: "Beatrice refuses to eat anything for her supper except common brown bread. I have offered her everything else, even cakes and bon-bons, but it is of no use."

"I never will eat that stuff again," the child declared, a wayward expression conquering the smile with which she had greeted Otto.

Without speaking, Otto rang the bell. "Bring a thin slice of brown bread for the baroness," he said to the servant who appeared.

"But——" Fräulein Normann interposed.

"I take the responsibility upon myself," the baron briefly explained. "Now, Beatrice," he continued, turning to his little cousin, "you shall have your brown bread, but upon one condition. After you have eaten it you must go out on the green and play for a quarter of an hour with the village children. Will you do so?"

"Oh, as long as you like; until my bedtime, Cousin Otto."

"No, for a quarter of an hour only; no more, and no less. Fräulein Normann will be good enough to see that you are exact about the time."

Fraälein Normann promised, although with many misgivings as to the result.

When, at the appointed time, her charge came into the house flushed and with her heart beating violently, the governess was in great distress about the illness sure, she thought, to ensue.

But Beatrice was in the best of spirits,—full of the new delight of a game of romps with other children, complaining that she was always the one to be caught because she could not run fast, but declaring that she should run faster the next day;

and thus she chattered on until she said she was tired, and asked to go to bed, a most unusual request.

During the night Fräulein Normann woke in dread several times, to find her charge still sleeping. It seemed quite unnatural that the child should not wake once, although she was restless at times, since it was the first night for many years in which the governess had not been obliged to hold the little hands repeatedly in her own and soothe the fevered imagination by assurances that Snow-white's stepmother was not by the bedside, nor the forty thieves hidden behind the stove.

When Beatrice saw her cousin the next morning, she ran to him, kissed his hand, and thanked him for what he had given her the previous evening. She did not dream, however, of the magnitude of the gift,—that with the slice of common bread he had restored to her her life, and with his orders for exercise in the fresh air he had formally cut himself off from the inheritance of Buchdorf.

From this time a new existence began for Beatrice. Otto by degrees reformed her entire manner of life. He arranged her diet, and medicine and sweets were replaced by simple, healthy food. The quarter of an hour's play in the afternoon was prolonged first to half an hour, and then to an hour, until at last whenever she was not at her books Beatrice spent all the time ranging the woods and fields with the village children.

When, one day, Fräulein Normann was lamenting over the destruction of one of the child's fine silk gowns, Otto asked her, with a smile, why she dressed her charge so foolishly. What use was there for such finery in the country? In consequence, Beatrice, to her great delight, was provided with dresses that would wash, and by her own entreaty the long curls on her shoulders fell beneath the scissors. Whatever the child's appearance thus lost in elegance was more than atoned for by the look of health that now began to characterize her face and figure. At the end of two months she did not

look like the same child. Although her cheeks did not yet show the roses that bloomed on those of her village companions, a fresh, healthy colour had replaced the old pallor, and her figure, though still slender, moved with the elasticity and ease of perfect health. She also made more rapid progress in her studies, since Otto made her diligence during lesson-hours regulate her time for play.

Very various were the opinions among the Buchdorfers regarding the altered life of their future mistress. One wise old peasant declared that it must surely be all right, for his cousin in Ermsdal had long since assured him that the young baron was a much better doctor than old Doctor Norden, and it was very good in him to take such an interest in the poor little baroness.

But the greater number pronounced it a sin and a shame to let the baroness run about so with the village children just as if they were her equals. "And," they added, "Baron Otto, with his gloomy face, going about and never speaking when he can help it, and never smiling at all, must have his own reasons for what he does." They could not imagine how Fräulein Normann could allow it all.

As for Beatrice herself, she brought to her new physician the gift of an utter devotion. However great Otto's reserve towards her might be, she was always desirous of being with him without disturbing him. While he was busy with his writing and accounts she would lie coiled up in a corner of the room with a book, keeping so entirely quiet that he was at times not even aware of her presence.

In his walks over the estates she always knew what direction he had taken, and upon his return he would continually find her patiently awaiting him, seated on a stone in some field near home.

She was always vexed when he went to Ermsdal, because then he stayed away several days.

"Where is that dreadful Ermsdal?" she once asked him.

Otto pointed in the direction where it lay.

"Will you not take me there with you some time?" the child asked again.

"No, that can't be done, little one."

"Why can't it be done?"

Otto smiled. "Between Buchdorf and Ermsdal there is a great wide swamp called the moor," he replied, to satisfy her. "No one can go there except myself. Every one else who should try would fall into the swamp and be drowned."

The child listened wide-eyed to this explanation. "I understand," she said, very gravely. "Just like the rich man and Lazarus that we read about this morning; there was a great gulf fixed between them. But I would have got across it somehow if I had been Lazarus."

Although she had always been wayward at times to every one, even to the mother who idolized her, she was never so with Otto, but would obey his slightest sign, fulfil his least command, however coldly it was given, with an unreasoning docility like the blind devotion accorded by a religious enthusiast to his divinity. It astonished every one, and Otto himself most of all.

One day a rough wooden chest arrived for the young baron from Ermsdal, and, as he did not readily ask service at the hands of the Buchdorf servants, he set to work to open it himself. He had just, after some trouble, succeeded in forcing his chisel a little way between the lid and the side of the chest, when the servant announced a visit from a neighbour desirous of seeing him immediately upon business. Otto hurriedly tried to pry up the tightly-nailed board, but in vain.

"I might have spared myself my trouble for the present," he muttered to himself, as he attempted to draw out the chisel.

"Let the iron stay in it, Cousin Otto," Beatrice gravely advised, advancing from her corner.

"Yes, little Solomon, if it would not fall out."

"It must be held there."

"Held there? For one, two, or three hours, until I return?"

"Why not? I'll hold it, cousin," the child said, taking hold of the handle of the tool.

"You?" laughed Otto. "It would hardly suit you, child."

He went, and upon his return, after considerably more than an hour's time, he was absolutely startled to find Beatrice still motionless on her knees before the chest. The chisel had been too heavy for her hand, and she was supporting it upon her shoulder, while, to make all sure, she had inserted her fingers in the opening between the lid and the side of the box.

"Beatrice, what are you about there?" the baron cried, in surprise.

"I am holding your chisel for you, Cousin Otto."

"My child, what an insane idea!" Arning interrupted her.

He did not know whether to laugh at the child's folly or to yield to the strange unwonted sensation that came like the warm breath of spring to his chilled heart and sent the moisture to his eyes. It was certainly ridiculous to kneel motionless for an hour holding a heavy chisel in place simply to save another five minutes' labour. But there was something so unspeakably touching in the unthinking devotion prompting the act on the part of so young a child, that Otto, for whom the last years had been indeed barren of affection, could not close his heart against it.

"You are not angry, cousin?" Beatrice asked, as she saw an unwonted expression in the eyes gazing at her in surprise.

"Angry? Certainly not. On the contrary, child, I thank you." And he laid his hand caressingly on her head with its short curls. It was the first caress from her cousin that Beatrice had ever received, and she grew crimson with delight.

Thus the summer passed away. Kurt's illness progressed surely but slowly; there was even a temporary amelioration of his condition. His reconciliation with Otto partially restored his forces, and the good accounts received from Fräulein Normann of his child's health helped to retain him in existence.

Harvest time arrived, and brought to Buchdorf, among other things, another short visit from Aunt Bernhardine. She asked several times after Beatrice, and was evidently disappointed not to find her at home. The canoness would have liked to convince herself of the progress of the child's disease during the past three months; but Otto made very little mention of the youthful heiress, being much occupied with the harvest. At last Aunt Bernhardine agreed to walk through the fields with him.

It was a very warm day; the skies shone in unclouded blue, but the two pedestrians nevertheless walked on briskly. Suddenly a sound of youthful shouts and laughter reached their ears from a steep eminence on one side of the pathway; on its summit a troop of girls, carrying baskets and cans filled with blackberries, made their appearance, while one figure detached itself from the merry group and ran, half bounding, half sliding, down the hillside until it stood directly in front of the aunt and nephew. It was Beatrice, who with stained lips and hands, and dress torn and scratched by the brambles, triumphantly offered to her cousin the basket of fruit she had herself gathered. She wore no hat, and her short hair hung in a tangle about her sunburned face.

"How heated you are, you little romp!" Otto said, laying his hand lightly on her forehead. "What are you doing here? I thought this was lesson-time."

"Why, it is Wednesday afternoon," the child said, merrily. "Take some blackberries, Cousin Otto."

Otto declined; then added, "You forget to speak to Aunt Bernhardine, and you should offer her some berries."

Beatrice turned to the canoness, and held out one hand in greeting, while with the other she proffered her basket of berries.

But Aunt Bernhardine accepted neither the one nor the other. Her gaze was riveted upon the blooming young face, that no longer showed a trace of languor or disease, and in which the eyes sparkled with gay, childish merriment. Fräulein von Tretten grew paler as she looked, and the gaze from her piercing black orbs would better have suited an encounter with an imp of darkness than with the bright, childish vision it rested upon.

When Beatrice found her courtesy rejected, she turned and scrambled up the hill again like a squirrel.

Otto went on with what he had been saying. "This field, as I told you——"

But the canoness interrupted him. Laying her hard right hand heavily upon the young man's shoulder, she pointed towards the hill with her left.

"What does that mean, Otto?" she asked, with suppressed passion.

Otto smiled. "We have the proof there of what I told you in the spring about Beatrice's health."

Aunt Bernhardine's hand dropped by her side. She looked abroad over the fields yellow with grain, with their hundreds of labourers busy binding the sheaves,—over the fair broad acres which for as far around as the eye could reach belonged to the romping child who had just vanished from her sight,—and then she turned to her nephew. "Otto," she said, in a low tone, "you are a fool."

"I know that, Aunt Bernhardine."

* * * * * * *

The autumn had come, the faded leaves were rustling down from the trees, and Kurt von Arning, whose life had brightened up for a brief space like the flame of a dying lamp, drew

his last breath placidly and painlessly. When his body had been carried to its grave in a foreign soil, Theresa hastened to leave Italy. She followed in eager haste the dispatch announcing her husband's demise, and reached Buchdorf on a cold morning in November. She had sent no previous intelligence of the time of her arrival, wishing to surprise those who expected her. Such surprises, however, rarely produce anything save disappointment to those concerned; and this occasion formed no exception to the rule. She could not have arrived at a more unfortunate time, for her idolized Beatrice was in bed that day with a trifling cold. A most severe disappointment it was for the mother, to whom her child had been described as perfectly well, to find her sick and in bed.

She went, of course, instantly upon her arrival to the nursery, and, not finding Beatrice there, into the adjoining bedroom, where, as if to fill to the brim the measure of ill fortune, she found the little baroness alone and in tears. It really seemed as if some evil spirit were at work here to add fuel to the flame that would destroy the bridge in process of erection across the gulf separating Theresa and Otto. Fate seemed determined so to widen the breach that no human hand should ever heal it more.

At her mother's unexpected appearance, the child, whose nerves were still far from strong, burst into an hysterical fit of crying. The terror with which the baroness was filled by the sight of her child thus affected, deprived her of all power of self-control. She was beside herself with grief and anxiety; she rang, she called, she sent for Fräulein Normann, for the nursery-maid, for Doctor Norden; she did not know what she was doing.

After a while Beatrice became more composed, and Theresa learned that she had been left alone because Fräulein Normann was playing on the piano; that she was crying because

Cousin Otto had not been to see her once that morning, and that Doctor Norden had not been sent for at all. All which information only fed the flame of Theresa's hatred for her kinsman.

Otto, who arrived from Grasort, where he had been busied since early morning, within half an hour of the baroness's appearance at Buchdorf, learned in the hall that she had come.

He entered Beatrice's nursery, where the baroness awaited him, with a few grave words of welcome on his lips. Kurt's death had moved him more deeply than he had thought possible after their long alienation. His old grudge against him had died out; the past was forgotten. Even his dislike of the baroness was hushed for the time, and if Theresa had only taken his proffered hand as it was tendered, all might have been well. But she gave him no time to speak. Indignation at what she supposed his faithless conduct, anxiety for her child, anger that she should have humbled herself to him in vain,—all these, and many other emotions less clearly defined in her mind, combined to stir to its depths her passionate nature, and unfortunately she was now entirely her own mistress. There was no longer any consideration to induce her to weigh her words, to curb her tongue. "My child is ill!" she exclaimed to Otto, with flashing eyes.

"Yes," the young man replied, with composure, "a slight cold."

"Slight or not slight, why is she left alone? She has been complaining bitterly that you have not been near her to-day. My Beatrice, sick and alone!"

"With regard to that you must call the governess to account. I only undertook the management of the property."

"Must I call the governess to account also for not sending for a physician to attend her? No, that was *your* work, Otto. I know you said you should see nothing of the child; but, nevertheless, you have put a stop to all Doctor Norden's wise

precautions; you have treated my Beatrice like a peasant's child, exposing her to the sun and weather, to everything that was thought most injurious for her feeble condition. Can you deny this?"

"Deny it?" the young baron replied, all his better nature again succumbing to the old hatred; "deny it? No; although I confess that I could have committed no greater folly."

"Yes, yes, it would be vain to attempt denial," the baroness began again. "Fräulein Normann, and even the most stupid servants in the house, have complained to me of your conduct. I know all that you have done in my absence, and I know now why you did it, and why you made me promise on no account to hold you responsible for whatever might occur. I thank God that I am in time to save my child!"

"Madame," Otto rejoined, his brow dark with anger, "you forget to whom you speak."

"To whom I speak!" the baroness exclaimed. "I speak to a man who, could I but have adduced the smallest proof——" She hesitated, terrified at her own temerity.

"Who what?" the baron insisted, while such lightning shot from his dark eyes that even Theresa paused for a moment undecided.

"Who, could I have adduced the smallest proof, would not six years ago have escaped the penalty he deserved," she rashly concluded her sentence.

"Enough," Otto haughtily replied. "Your friendship, madame, I have never desired, and my cousin's death has severed the only tie between us. From this hour we are strangers; for your sake, I trust we may never meet again."

"No, no! you shall not go away," Beatrice cried aloud. She had been standing for some minutes on the threshold of her bedroom, listening to what was passing.

"What! you here too, little viper!" Otto exclaimed, trying to extricate himself from the child's despairing embrace.

"You will go to Ermsdal," she cried, weeping, "and you will never come here again across that dreadful moor. Do not, ah, do not at least leave me so,—say good-bye, Cousin Otto. I have not been a naughty girl."

But he pushed the child from him with a degree of violence. She sank on the floor, and he left the room and the house.

Theresa carried the weeping child back to bed. Doctor Norden came, and had much to say in disapproval of Otto and his medical skill; but as he was an honest man he could not deny that Beatrice had been very well during the summer, nor could he discover in her present ailment anything more alarming than a feverish cold. He allowed her to leave her bed immediately. For the first time in months she was carefully dressed in silk and velvet. But the child did nothing all day long but ask for Cousin Otto, until at last Theresa, to quiet her, assured her that she would see him and ask him to return.

The evening of this agitating day found Otto once more pacing to and fro in the hall at Ermsdal. The rain again fell in torrents, the wind howled and shrieked louder than on the evening when Kurt's letter had arrived, and between the two days lay spring, summer, autumn, and one more bitter experience.

In spite of the huge crackling fire of logs in the rude chimney, it was bitter cold in the hall; but the chill did not reach the young baron. The student-lamp still stood upon the oaken table, but beside it now lay, instead of Kurt's letter, a brace of pistols. The ghostly shadow of Otto's restless figure flitted to and fro on the rough walls; now and then he laughed harshly; at last he paused. "Fool!" he cried, striking his forehead with his clenched fist. "Yes, Aunt Bernhardine, you are right I was a fool,—an unutterable fool!"

Slowly and clumsily the huge hall door leading out of the house opened at this moment; a cold blast of wind drove in the falling rain, and the slender figure of a child appeared

upon the threshold. Otto turned towards it, gazed for an instant at the intruder, and then raised the lamp as if unable to trust his eyes. But they had not deceived him. Beatrice von Arning was standing timidly on the threshold, without hat or outside covering, looking at him with a world of reproach in her large eyes. The rain was dripping from her blue silk dress, and her dark curls clung about her brow.

"Beatrice! Good God, how came you here?"

"Across the moor," the child replied, exhausted. "I told you I would come. Why did you go away without bidding me good-bye, Cousin Otto?" she went on, with tears in her dark eyes. "What have I done to you to make you so angry with me?"

"Across the moor?" Otto repeated, as in a dream. Not a peasant in Ermsdal ventured without extreme caution to cross the dangerous tract which this mere child had just traversed in the dark, stormy night. "Across the moor? To say good-bye—to me?"

Involuntarily he stooped and caught her to his heart. He kissed her forehead, her lips, her eyes; he had never done so before. But for the moment he forgot his past life, all that lay between himself and Buchdorf; he forgot that it was Theresa's child whom he held in his arms. He felt transported to another and a better world, so intoxicating was the child's affectionate devotion to his starved heart. He closed the door and sat down with the child on his lap, stroking her wet hair tenderly as she nestled her head upon his shoulder.

"You are not angry with me now, Cousin Otto?" she asked, softly.

He pressed her closer in his arms. "Who could be angry with you?" he said, tenderly. "How you are shivering, my poor little darling! It must have been cold and stormy on the moor."

"Yes, but I was not afraid. I knew that I was coming to you."

"My brave little girl!"

The old housekeeper entered. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed in amazement. "How came the little mistress of Buchdorf here?"

"Of Buchdorf——" The word that broke the spell was spoken—Otto was himself again.

"Yes," he said, rising, "the child came here to see me. Heaven knows how she found the way. Put her to bed, Dora, and make her a cup of warm weak tea to keep her from taking cold. Go with Dora, Beatrice."

"But you will come up and see me, Cousin Otto," she begged, "or I will not leave you."

"Yes, yes, I will come by and by. Go, and be a good girl, Beatrice."

But the little baroness waited in vain for Otto's promised visit. Hatred and defiance had again taken up their abode in his heart.

When Dora entered the hall at five o'clock the next morning, she found her master in his hunting-dress, loading his rifle.

The old housekeeper had learned to read the baron's face too well not to know that the frown on his brow boded no good.

"The Herr Baron is going to hunt to-day?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Will the Herr Baron be back by noon?"

"I do not know."

"What is to be done with the child up-stairs, Herr Baron?"

"Have it taken home," Otto replied, throwing his rifle across his shoulder. "Hire the innkeeper's vehicle, let Klaus put on his old livery coat, and tell him to harness the four grays."

"*Four* horses, Herr Baron?"

"*Four* horses."

"Excuse me, Herr Baron, but the men are just——"

"*Four horses*, I say," Otto repeated, in a tone and with a look that caused the words to die on Dora's lips. "The noble baroness must be conducted to her home with all due honour," he added, bitterly, in an undertone.

The housekeeper hesitated a moment.

"Will not the Herr Baron go up-stairs before he leaves the house?"

"What for—why should I go up-stairs?"

"Ah, the child has moaned and cried all night long because the Herr Baron did not come up as he promised. And she is such a dear little thing! And since she came all that way in the stormy night—I should think—the Herr Baron——"

"Silence!" And Otto stamped his foot on the stone floor. "I do not choose to see her. Take good care that she is gone by the time I return, or——" The rest of the sentence was drowned in the crashing to of the heavy oaken door as he went out.

Dora went up-stairs again, shaking her head.

"He will not come, my pretty pet," she said to Beatrice. "But don't fret. He's in such a temper that he's no loss."

Then she went to obey Otto's orders; and an hour later, in spite of her tears and struggles, in spite of her entreaties to be allowed to see Cousin Otto once more, poor Beatrice was put into the coach and carried back by the four horses to Buchdorf.

CHAPTER VIII.

NINE years had passed since Kurt's death. Otto had refused to accept either Grasort or the guardianship of Beatrice, although both had been bequeathed to him by Kurt, whose final testament, however, was to be first opened and read upon Beatrice's eighteenth birthday,—an occasion to which Theresa looked forward with much anxiety. The relations with Otto remained the same; incredible as it may appear, they had not once met during this long term of years. In fact, the relative situation of the two estates made it quite easy for the owner of each to avoid the other, for although not far removed from Buchdorf in a direct line, Ermsdal could only be reached, on account of the moor, by a circuitous route through Harsbye, Grasort, and Wingen. In addition to this the baroness had at various times spent many years in foreign countries, while Otto never left his home except for a visit to the capital.

In the new dwelling which he had built for himself, and which had little to distinguish it from the abodes of the peasants around it, he led as lonely and misanthropic an existence as in the ruined castle of old. His increasing wealth brought no change in his habits of life. Aunt Bernhardine, who had been living beneath his roof for some years, ordered his small household with great frugality and economy.

Frau von Arning had spent the previous winter in Rome. During the early summer she had been travelling in Switzerland, and she would have returned thence to Italy, but that she could not withstand Beatrice's longing desire to see her home again.

Theresa dreaded a German winter; she was excessively

fond of art, of society, and of pleasure, and could not think without a shudder of the wind and snow that made her Northern home at times so bleak and bare. She could not conceive how a young girl could long for so unfriendly a spot, and had no comprehension of the feeling of reverential devotion which attracted her child to the soil where her ancestors had resided for many generations. Theresa, however, was too affectionate a mother to disregard her daughter's desire, and thus with a heavy heart she resolved upon returning to Buchdorf.

She had secured a pleasant companion for the journey in Emil von Lindau, the son of one of her early friends. Frau von Arning had met him in Switzerland, whither he had gone, it was said, for the sake of his health, since his mamma had one day discovered that her only son looked pale and languid. His father, who occupied an important post under government, procured him a several months' leave of absence, and Emil with great satisfaction carried his real or fancied ill health and his twenty-one years to Switzerland.

He was really a good young fellow, too young in many respects to be left entirely his own master, still rather too much tied to his mother's apron-string to be extremely interesting; but so well-bred, with so much conventional polish, that the baroness, who perhaps overvalued these qualities, became really fond of him, especially since her decided, rather imperious nature gladly gave the law to those about her. Beatrice, too, was very well pleased with their new acquaintance, and therefore the baroness invited the young man to spend what remained of his leave of absence at Buchdorf, an invitation which Emil accepted with all the more eagerness from the fact that his finances were just at present at a low ebb; also he was, as indeed was but natural, desperately enamoured of the young baroness. Theresa marked this with a favourable eye. She was not avaricious, so Emil's lack of fortune was no dis-

advantage in her eyes. Beatrice was rich enough. What Frau von Arning desired in the husband of her child was a true honest heart, an ancient name, and good breeding, and Emil von Lindau appeared to unite in his person all these requirements. His youth, too, was in his favour, since she might easily mould him to her will.

Late on a lovely August afternoon, the coach conveying the travellers from the railway-station drove along the shady Buchdorf avenue towards the vine-wreathed terrace, where the steward, dressed with exceeding elegance, a crimson rose in his button-hole, stood waiting to receive them. It was the same Warne who, fifteen years before, had testified so unfavourably upon Otto's trial. In spite of his forty years he would have been thought strikingly handsome by all who rank beauty of feature beyond that of expression. The dark-blue eyes that habitually sought the ground beneath their fringe of black lashes, the thick fair hair above the white if not broad forehead, the whole type of feature, certainly attracted although they did not rivet admiration. Herr von Tannen, nevertheless, an old friend and youthful playmate of the deceased baron's, always shook his head gravely at mention of Heinrich Warne's beauty. Tannen was no friend of the steward's, and had often cautioned Theresa against him and his negligent administration of her affairs; but Frau von Arning was of so independent a character that she never mistrusted her own judgment, even in matters of which she necessarily knew but little; in addition to which, Tannen's opinion bore but small weight with her, since he had always been a warm friend and advocate of young Arning, to whose father he had been much attached. She reposed a blind confidence in her steward's honesty and ability. Warne gradually became her councillor, her minister of finance, her factotum in short, and as constancy was one of her leading traits, nothing less than proofs clear as daylight of his untrustworthiness could have robbed him of her favour

Besides all this, Heinrich Warne was personally much to the baroness's taste: he was very punctual, always dressed with great elegance, never appeared in her drawing-room with muddy boots, always had plenty of time when she needed him, or wished him to drive with her, and plenty of money if she required it, never troubling her with accounts, deeds, purchases, or sales. Not that Theresa could ever have taken a very warm personal interest in the man; but his repose of manner, his courtesy, his silent resolute demeanour, pleased her because they added to the comfort of her household.

The carriage stopped, and the baroness descended with the queenly bearing that characterized her every movement. Except for two slight wrinkles that showed upon her white forehead, Theresa had scarcely altered in the last ten years, and her beauty was enchanting as she greeted the steward with kindly grace, in which there was, it is true, an admixture of condescension. But it was not upon her that his glance rested; it turned with admiring surprise to Beatrice, who, refusing Lindau's aid, sprang from the carriage and with frank cordiality held out her ungloved hand to Warne.

"Here we are at home once more, Herr Warne," she cried, gaily; "now there will be all sorts of confusion and disorder in your quiet kingdom. Yes, yes, you may well be dismayed. I, for one, am come back with the firm determination to give you no end of trouble. To-morrow, to begin with, you must show me everything that has undergone even the slightest change in my beloved Buchdorf. I must see everything. How are Hans and Liese, and the new colts? Is old Hector alive still?"

"But, my child," Theresa smilingly interposed, "Herr Warne cannot answer three questions at a time. We must first recover from the fatigue of our journey, and to-morrow we will take every thing in due order. Herr Warne, let me

introduce my young friend Herr von Lindau, who will give us the pleasure of his society for a few weeks."

The two gentlemen bowed rather stiffly.

All had meanwhile been traversing the wide hall, and now entered the dining-room where was spread an inviting repast. Beatrice did not deign it a look, but running to the glass door leading directly into the park, she opened it wide. "Oh, my park, my darling park, how I have longed for you!" she cried, between laughter and tears. "Forgive me, dearest mamma, but indeed I must take one look at it to-night."

"Dear child, are you not tired then?" the baroness asked, as she looked after her daughter hurrying out beneath the trees. The girl's exclamations showed such a fulness of delight that the mother felt more than repaid for the sacrifice she had made in returning to the solitude of her estate. Involuntarily, as she gazed out into the park, the past rose before her mind. How often had her weary, despairing eyes rested upon that fresh green turf, those majestic trees, as she sat by the bedside of her sick darling! Oh, how much happier she was now! What was her life in Italy in comparison with her child's health and happiness? Involuntarily she clasped her hands in something like a prayer of gratitude. But of the man to whom, under God, she owed her child's life, she thought not at all, or only with hatred and bitterness.

Beatrice meanwhile hurried along the well-kept paths with outstretched arms. She could have kissed the trees and shrubs; did not every step recall some happy scene of her childhood? Ah, she had reached the little lake; in its smooth surface the tall silver poplars were mirrored, and the weeping willows dipped their drooping boughs into the placid water. Through the trees shone the crimson light dying in the west and now and then tinging with a rosy hue the white plumage of the swans as they glided from shore to shore. On the other side of the lake, where formerly a mass of dark shrub-

bery had given rather a gloomy and confined aspect to the scene, there lay before the girl's admiring eyes a stretch of grassy lawn sprinkled here and there with flower-beds and extending to the foot of the little hill crowned by the Chinese summer-house. Beatrice stood still, and could not refrain from an exclamation of delight and surprise. "Oh, how lovely it is here!" she murmured, half unconsciously, then turned startled as a deep voice close beside her said, "I am extremely glad, Fräulein von Arning, that the improvements meet your approval. To confess the truth, I feared lest the change which I have made here might displease you."

"Oh, Herr Warne," the young girl exclaimed, recovering herself, "how you frightened me!"

Warne exhausted himself in apologies; he had followed Fräulein von Arning to point out to her the alterations he had ventured to make, and he was excessively sorry——

"Never mind," Beatrice interrupted him; "after all, it is my fault for being so easily startled. But you wanted to tell me about this, and I am dying with curiosity. Why do you hesitate, and look at me as if you were afraid I was not myself? I assure you I am the real Beatrice."

"I do not doubt it," Warne said, with a smile, without however turning his eyes from his young mistress; "but yet you are not precisely the same young lady who left Buchdorf a few years ago. I fear that my information which was destined for the child Beatrice will possess but small interest for Fräulein von Arning."

"Oh, yes, you find me altered," the young baroness said, gaily. "Mamma says so too. I have grown, and wear a train, very long, as you see, and very uncomfortable, as I can tell you, but in all else, believe me, I am the same old Beatrice, who longs to know, to begin with, how my dear Ami is."

"Your deer is as tame as ever," the steward replied "I

have fed it every morning myself, and in a few days it will know you as of old."

"That was kind of you, Herr Warne," Beatrice said, cordially, "and I thank you."

"The Frau Baroness sends me," said Emil von Lindau, who made his appearance at this moment with a paper in his hand, "to entreat you to come into the house, as she is afraid the evening air may give you cold, Fräulein von Arning."

"We are coming," Beatrice replied. "What have you there, Herr von Lindau? Have you had so sudden an access of sketching fever that you are going on this first evening to caricature our poor little lake?—which in fact deserves to be reproduced by a genuine artist," she added, in a graver tone, her eyes drinking in the beauty before her.

"I only paint flowers; I have never attempted landscape," Lindau replied with a rather aggrieved air. "Yes, yes, laugh as you will, but wait until I have finished decorating your fan. I assure you I was quite famous for my flowers in society last winter, and I should have spent every day and all day long in painting roses and forget-me-nots on the fans of my partners in the cotillion if my mother had not begged me to employ my time more usefully. But this paper is, as you see, a very innocent telegraphic dispatch to inform my mother of our safe arrival, and I shall be very much obliged to you, Herr Warne, if you will see that it is sent immediately to M——, for I forgot to leave it as we passed through."

Warne, who had been watching the two young people from beneath his drooping lids with a strange expression, offered to ride himself to M—— with the dispatch, and Lindau would have accepted the service as a matter of course, had not Beatrice decidedly objected. "By no means, Herr Warne. Any groom can take it to M——. You would not leave us alone on the very first evening of our arrival? Herr von Lindau," she said, in an undertone, as the steward withdrew, "Warne

has been more than twenty years in our family, and is considered quite as a member of it. Do not take advantage of his modesty to accept services from him which it really is not his duty to perform."

A few hours afterwards profound silence reigned throughout the house. The whole family had withdrawn to their various apartments. The baroness, really fatigued by her journey, was asleep. Beatrice was sitting in an arm-chair before the open window of her pretty room, a room chosen in an upper story for the sake of the charming prospect, gazing out in a state of dreamy beatitude over the moonlit park. Emil, who was wanting in any genuine love of nature, had closed his window and drawn the curtain, and was sitting at a table covered with sheets of paper of all sizes, each bearing an almost undecipherable and therefore entirely irreproachable monogram. The young man's costly portfolio lay open before him, and, with a pen the elaborate carving on the handle of which must have made any comfort in writing impossible, was inditing a letter to his mamma.

Warne also had closed his shutters, not so much to exclude the moonlight as because he liked to be secure in his own room from prying glances. The lamp was burning upon a clumsy table covered with bills, books, and unopened letters, all which the steward did not appear to see, although his eyes were now as wide open as the eyes of men usually are. A cigar in his mouth, his hands clasped behind him, he noiselessly paced his room to and fro with a step as regular as the ticking of the old cuckoo-clock that hung on the wall above the writing-table. This clock had once hung in Otto's sanctum, and only after the old baron's death, when the baroness had rearranged and refurnished the entire house, had it been transferred to the steward's room. Now, Warne was a man of nerve and resolution, not at all prone to superstition; he had not opposed the hanging of the clock in its present place, and yet it

would be false to maintain that he had any special liking for this memento of young Von Arning. Every time the monotonous cuckoo struck the hour it reminded him of the morning when, as he listened to the cry of this bird in the forest, he had resolved upon a lie which forever turned his path in life aside from that of truth and honour. The steward's conscience possessed, it is true, great elasticity, and any other crime save that of perjury would scarcely have troubled his lightest slumber, but the solemn penalty of expulsion from eternal mercy in this world and the next attached to this crime would continually, though vaguely, occur to him among the mysterious memories of childhood that often haunt a man's after-years. He never had repented the act, but he avoided in every way possible any recurrence to it in his mind.

"A prudent woman is the baroness," he muttered to himself, interrupting his gloomy reverie. "Her talent is undeniable. A very pretty pattern of a son-in-law, this, which she has devised; not quite formed yet, to be sure, but the right stuff,—can be controlled, revised, and corrected! Hm! But the little Fräulein has a will of her own, and my insignificance cannot be left out of the game."

He thoughtfully blew forth a cloud of tobacco-smoke. "I suppose the betrothal is to take place before the eleventh of November," he continued. "If I only knew what the old fool's idea was with his two wills! No one can tell what atonement the old man may have taken it into his foolish head to make to that fellow at Ermsdal; and the baroness evidently feels a little shaky, and bethinks her that no commands either of the dead or living can interfere with a husband's authority. Bravo, my lady! Well schemed! But, my much revered Frau von Arning, *I* do not consent. It is too speedy a conclusion of affairs. I should lose the results of the labour of years; and then, by heaven! I grudge the girl to that brainless

fop. Of course she must and will marry some time, and my best days are past—stay!"

He struck his forehead with his open palm, took one or two hasty turns through the apartment, and then paused before the large mirror that hung on the wall, its broad, richly-carved gilt frame tarnished with age and tobacco-smoke. The glass, however, was as clear as ever, and reflected with great distinctness the steward's figure standing in the full light of the lamp in evening dress, with the half-withered rose in his button-hole. Heinrich Warne, careful though he was as to his personal adornment, was no fop; the steady and minute inspection which he now accorded to his face and figure was made with strict impartiality, and he could not but perceive that as yet his years had left no trace upon his brow, and that he might safely enter the lists with a much younger man. With a sigh of relief he turned away, drew aside the curtain, and opened his window. Between the trees he could catch the shimmer of moonlight on the little lake,—a picture of peaceful repose.

"Yes, Buchdorf is beautiful!" Warne murmured, with a slight smile. "The young baroness is right to cling to it. I share her preference, and will do my best to remain here always."

"Cuckoo!" came at this moment from Otto's clock upon the wall. Warne turned pale, and started as if at some ghostly warning. "Curse it!" he muttered. He dropped the curtain which he was holding aside, and mounting a chair stopped the small piece of machinery that aroused such disagreeable memories in his mind.

CHAPTER IX.

THE afternoon was warm upon which, several days after her return home, the baroness was sitting on the shady terrace before an inviting tea-table, looking across the book she held in her hand towards where Beatrice was playing croquet on the lawn with Herr von Lindau, and whence peals of girlish laughter came floating in delicious music to her mother's ears. Opposite Theresa, at the other end of the terrace, sat Warne, silent, quiet, his eyes cast down as usual, thoughtfully smoking his cigar.

"Will you have another cup of coffee, Herr Warne?" the baroness called to him.

"I thank you, no, madame." Then, after a pause, "I am really sorry to trouble you with business so soon after your return, but I have some deeds of sale and other papers that require your signature. I am afraid I shall have to trouble you frequently in this way for a while."

"Can I not give you some more of those signed formulas?" Theresa asked. "The whole thing is a mere form; the management of the property is entirely in your hands, and of course I will sign whatever you think proper."

"The method you propose is perfectly feasible, madame, provided indeed that you do not wish first to read——"

"What I cannot understand," Theresa completed his sentence. "No, Herr Warne, I would have every one fulfil the duty given him to do; but for a person entirely ignorant of business to undertake to examine and test what has been prepared by another of thorough business knowledge and capacity, seems to me both folly and waste of time. So bring me this evening as many blank formulas as you want, and I will

return them to you with my signature to-morrow morning." Warne bowed.

"What do you think, mamma!" Beatrice exclaimed at this moment, running up the broad steps of the terrace, her croquet mallet in her hand; "Herr von Lindau is bored here! No, don't deny it," she continued, turning to the young officer, who followed her slowly and looking very much heated, "I plainly saw your face grow longer and longer in spite of my efforts to make the game interesting. For a punishment you must now take a ride."

"It would be a reward if you would let me accompany you," Lindau rejoined, with an admiring gaze at his companion, who took off her broad straw hat and pushed back the short curls that would lie in rings about her brow and temples, while the rest of her chestnut hair was simply coiled in braids about her graceful head.

"I cannot ride Ali, any more," she said, in reply to Lindau's request. "He has grown so fat and lazy. I must have a new riding-horse."

"Not a very modest wish, my darling," said the baroness. "I hardly know whether it can be gratified this year. We have had to spend a great deal of money. What do you say, Herr Warne? Did you not tell me the harvest had been very poor?"

"I did; but there is really no reason why any desire of Fräulein von Arning's should not be complied with, especially if Ali, who is not so worthless as she seems to suppose, is sold——"

"That shall not be," the young girl interrupted him, decidedly. "I would rather have no riding-horse. What! sell a creature who has given me so many delightful hours! To some hackman perhaps in town, where he will be driven to death! No, no, Ali shall be taken care of in his old age."

"It would be cruel to deny anything to such an angel of pity as Fräulein von Arning," the steward rejoined.

The baroness thought her daughter's view of the matter unpractical, but was so charmed with the tender heart that dictated the words that she did not gainsay them. Herr von Lindau, however, said, drily, "If these views are to rule your conduct, Fräulein von Arning, Buchdorf will in a few years be a perfect hospital for sick horses and cows. It is a fine thing to have the means of gratifying such tastes."

"How disagreeable you are!" Beatrice pouted; "you say that because you have to ride alone——"

"I will go order your horse to be saddled, Herr Baron," said the steward, rising, and leaving the terrace.

"Thanks," Lindau called after him. "There is no hope then of your accompanying me, Fräulein von Arning?"

"I will come and see you mount."

"That is small consolation," the young officer remarked, as he followed Warne.

"Do you know, mamma," said Beatrice, thoughtfully, when he had gone, "that I should like our steward much better if he were not so very officious? Why should he trouble himself about the horse of a man who always treats him with arrogance?"

Many a plan is brought to naught by the pride and insolence of its author; the rock upon which Warne's schemes were shattered was servility.

As soon as Emil had vanished down the avenue, Beatrice went to her room to get gloves and parasol; then, tying on her hat, she left the house, sending a servant to acquaint Frau von Arning with her departure.

She longed for one of the lonely walks in which from her childhood she had so delighted. She wished to revisit Repach, a neighbouring estate, famous for its beautiful forests

belonging to an elderly man who was always absent and had been long trying in vain to dispose of it.

At the end of half an hour she found herself in the cool, shady wood-paths. Beatrice drew a deep sigh of pleasure, and gathering up her light summer-dress walked lightly over the green carpet of moss, where the sunlight lay here and there in golden flecks. It was her favourite walk; here she had never encountered a human being, and the birds seemed to sing more gaily and clearly in this solitude than in the more frequented parts of the woodland. She turned aside into the thicket, passing lightly through its depths, bending back the boughs that barred her way, until she saw before her a small, turfy opening, in the centre of which grew a mighty oak-tree, one of those giants of the forest which are becoming rarer every day. The country-people called it the king oak, and it did, in fact, look as if the smaller trees and shrubs had reverentially retired from about their monarch, forming the nearly circular opening which Beatrice had thus reached. Opposite her, on the edge of the forest, she saw a deer; she would have known him among a thousand. "Ami!" she called, surprised and pleased.

The animal started at the sound of the well-known voice, and turned his slender head in the direction whence the call proceeded. At that moment a shot was heard; Ami made one or two bounds to reach his mistress, and then sank helpless on the ground, while Beatrice, filled with indignation and sorrow, hastened to the poor creature's side.

"How dare you shoot on Herr von Stade's ground?" she said, anger flashing from her eyes, to the unknown huntsman, who now made his appearance from the forest, his gun in one hand and holding back his dog with the other. "I will see to it that you do not go unpunished."

"You are mistaken, Fräulein von Arning. I am no poacher; I am shooting upon my own domain," the stranger

replied, advancing with a slight salutation. "Repach has just been sold."

"Sold?" Beatrice repeated, incredulously.

"The intelligence seems to surprise you," the huntsman remarked. "It chances that I can give you proof of my assertion. Lie down, Juno!" The last words quieted his dog, who seemed desirous of rushing upon the wounded deer. The stranger opened his wallet and took thence a paper which he handed, with a slight smile, to his angry opponent. Beatrice took it impatiently and read upon the outside, "Deed of sale concluded August 15, 18—, between Herr George von Stade and Otto, Freiherr von Arning——"

She read no further, but raised her eyes in troubled inquiry to the supposed poacher, and a sudden light dawned upon her soul. Yes, it was Otto von Arning. How could she have been so blind as not to recognize him at the first glance?

For nine years she had been taught sedulously to avoid all encounter with her dreaded cousin Otto, only to come upon him now in so extremely undesirable a manner. She grew very pale, and, not daring to look up, could not see the expression of bitter impatience that her evident terror called forth on the baron's countenance. He waited for a few moments; then, seeing that the young girl still maintained an embarrassed silence, he said, calmly, "Are you satisfied, Fräulein von Arning?"

Beatrice recovered herself, and handed him the paper.

"Yes, I see that you are in the right," she said, sadly, "and that all that I can do is to apologize for my violence, and —try to forget my poor Ami," she added, her eyes filling with tears as she looked at the deer, whose large eyes, as he gazed at his mistress, were filled with mute reproach and entreaty.

"Is it a tame deer?" Otto asked, surprised. "Oh, this I never meant! I am excessively sorry."

Beatrice kneeled on the grass beside her favourite and

stroked its head. "Only this morning it ate from my hand, and it was running to meet me when——" She sprang up. "Kill it, Herr von Arning," she said, with tear-dimmed eyes. "At least put it out of its pain."

Otto approached the animal, the poor thing making a vain attempt to rise as he did so.

"I do not think I have wounded it mortally," he said. "Let me see." And, leaning his gun against the trunk of the oak-tree, he began carefully to examine the wound.

Beatrice had recovered from the first shock of her surprise. She ventured to observe this man whom she had heard so maligned more attentively, that she might compare the reality with the image which her memory still retained. Otto had greatly altered in the last nine years; his features were more decided; his eyes had become larger and darker; but what struck his young cousin more forcibly than all else was the expression of repressed but settled melancholy that characterized his face, and filled her, she could hardly tell why, with the deepest sympathy.

Meanwhile, Otto finished his examination, and turning to her with a faint smile, "Reassure yourself, Fräulein von Arning," he said; "the wound is not serious; your favourite will certainly live."

"Really? Oh, thanks; a thousand thanks!" Beatrice cried, her eyes sparkling with joy. "Do you hear, Ami? we shall have many a ramble together!"

Otto proceeded to tear his handkerchief into bandages with which he bound up the wound, while Beatrice by her caresses induced the deer to lie quiet. When Von Arning had finished, he arose and took the animal in his arms.

"What are you going to do?" the young baroness asked, looking up at him with eyes of childish wonder.

"Take my patient to the nearest peasant hut. It must not stay here in the forest."

Beatrice could not remember any dwelling near at hand, but she nevertheless followed him. She was a brave girl at heart, and it had required years of warning and admonition from her mother and governess before the image of the cousin she had so loved had been converted into the bugbear of her imagination. Now that he stood beside her, she smiled at her fancied fears. In the light of reality, the broad sunshine, her companion's quiet words and demeanour, banished every foolish phantom of her imagination.

The trees grew sparse, the borders of the forest were soon reached, and the pair emerged upon a strip of meadow-land bordering the moor. Just at its edge there was a stunted birch-tree beside a low hut with crumbling mud walls and an old straw-thatched roof. The baron directed his steps towards it. Beatrice involuntarily hesitated an instant.

"Brown Elsie's hut," she said, timidly, not venturing directly to oppose the baron. "Do you think Ami will be well taken care of there?"

"Why not there as well as in any other peasant hut?" Otto asked in return.

"I do not know, but I think it would be better not to entrust him to Brown Elsie. I remember her in my childhood. She used to tie threads to the poor beetles, and always abused us or threw stones at us. No one liked her, and we used to chase her whenever we saw her,—vainly, of course. She could run much faster than any of us. I have not seen her for years, nor her grandmother, the old fortune-teller; but no one speaks well of them; they are dreaded by the people about here."

"Outcasts!" From Otto's lips the word came with so strange an emphasis that Beatrice looked up in surprise, but the baron, apparently, did not observe her look. With a shrug, he continued, "And yet Elsbeth is the prettiest girl in all Ermsdal, and might have been just like other people

if she had been treated with a little affection and a little patience."

"You know her?" Beatrice quickly asked.

"I know every one upon my land."

They had reached the hut, and Otto pushed open the huge door that occupied almost the entire wall. Small and poor as the structure was, it was precisely similar in arrangement to all other peasant abodes in that part of the country. You entered by the "Fleet," or outer passage, where, instead of the cattle-stalls on either side to be found in the house of every well-to-do peasant, lay heaped willow-withes, potatoes, flax, wood, and other stores, piled together in picturesque confusion, among which treasures the sole live-stock, a lean black goat, wandered about at will, now and then slily nibbling at a cabbage-head. The interesting part of the house lay at the other end of this passage. Through the one small window in the western wall the warm afternoon sun streamed in, and threw a strange, garish light upon the picture that greeted the eyes of the visitors at the other end of the dark entry. On the left of the spacious hearth, where, notwithstanding the heat of the weather, a glimmering fire slumbered, stood the wide bed, hung and covered with blue checked linen; beside it was an antique chest painted in gay colours, chiefly red and blue. By the hearth stood a spinning-wheel and a chair, in which sat crouched together a very old woman, apparently taking an afternoon doze.

Her appearance was certainly not one to inspire either respect or confidence, although for the moment nothing of her yellow face could be seen save the wrinkled brow and the pointed chin, with the nose just showing between them. Around her head was wound a torn, black woollen cloth, from beneath which her matted white hair escaped in stiff elf-locks. The rest of her dress seemed only a huddled mass of coarse stuff in which her figure was enveloped. A clumsy shoe just

showed beneath it, and upon the old woman's knees lay stretched, apparently as a kind of animated duvet, a huge black cat.

On the side of the hearth some rude shelves sustained a few rusty kettles and earthen basins, and beneath them stood a rough table. Near the window there was a wooden bench, and upon the window-seat sat a girl about as old as Beatrice, —Brown Elsie. The name had not been bestowed without cause; her complexion was almost that of a mulatto, and betrayed at a glance the fact that she was of a race entirely foreign to that of the flaxen-haired, blue-eyed German children among whom she had grown up. Innate antipathy of race had early fostered the enmity between them.

The shape of Elsbeth's face was a perfect oval. Her features were not regular, but very marked. Her greatest beauty unquestionably lay in her deep black eyes, which were capable of expressing every emotion of the human heart, from the wildest passion to the most devoted tenderness, although they usually looked out upon the world in sullen indifference. There was a classic beauty also in the little brown foot which rested bare upon the wooden bench beneath the window-seat. The girl's dress consisted of a gray, well-patched petticoat, and a sort of gray shift, which, cut close about the neck, yet left the slender, graceful arms bare. This costume evidently, however, did not satisfy Elsbeth's sense of the beautiful, for the strange creature wore wrapped about her shoulders, after a most fantastic fashion, an old scarlet shawl. Upon her knees she held a fragment of looking-glass, in which she was complacently observing her reflection while endeavouring to entwine a spray of ivy in the coarse, straight black hair that lay loose upon her shoulders. She did not for an instant desist from her occupation upon the entrance of the visitors, to whom she scarcely accorded a fleeting glance of observation.

The baron gently laid down his burden and approached the

old woman. "Mother Stina," he said, "we bring you here a deer, a deer belonging to my young companion. It is wounded, and needs nursing: will you do all you can to restore it to strength?"

The old woman did not reply; she opened a pair of small gray eyes, in which was plainly to be seen the reason why the country-people believed her endowed with the curse of the evil eye. With a look of surprise she gazed from one to the other of her visitors, and then, as if she had discovered something excessively comical, she burst into low, chuckling laughter.

"Do you not know who we are?" Otto asked, sternly.

"Oh, to be sure!" the woman laughed. "How can I help it? You are the wild young baron, and she there is the little heiress——"

"Enough, enough!" Otto interrupted her.

Her chuckling had ended in a fit of coughing. When she recovered her breath, she continued, in the same jeering tone, "Well, well; then you are the weasel and she is the dove. Shall I tell the pretty white dove her fortune?" she suddenly asked Beatrice.

On an ordinary occasion the young baroness would have had the interest in a fortune-teller or would-be soothsayer natural to girls of her age; but Mother Stina fairly terrified her.

"I am not curious to know about the future, my good woman," she replied; "but I shall be grateful to you if you will take care of my poor deer."

"You would not hear a very fine tale," the crone grinned. "For look ye, child, in the end the weasel always sucks the dove's life-blood, and the cat kills the mouse when it has played with it long enough; and so it will be with you, white dove, struggle and flutter as you may. The weasel once had you by the wing, and some fine morning he will clutch your little throat."

Her manner of saying these words, the whole scene, had such

a terrifying effect upon Beatrice that involuntarily she recoiled. The look of mute appeal which she turned upon Otto almost robbed him of self-control. He strode up to the old woman. "Silence!" he thundered, raising his hand, "or——"

Beatrice gazed at him in terror. She could not see his face, but the tone of his voice was one of such intense and passionate agitation that she really feared for the old woman. Before she knew what she was doing she stood beside him, and laid her hand upon his arm. "Herr von Arning, spare her. The woman is insane," she said, almost reproachfully.

Otto had already retreated, stern and silent, perhaps ashamed of his violence. Beatrice continued, addressing old Stina: "I pray you, good woman, promise me that you will take good care of Ami, and we will disturb you no longer. Be sure you shall be well rewarded for your pains," she added, seeing that Mother Stina made no reply.

But this promise also produced no effect; the old woman wagged her turbaned head, and went on muttering about doves and weasels. Troubled and uncertain what she had best do or say, the young girl's gaze sought Von Arning, from whom she feared another outburst. But Otto was standing near the door, with folded arms, and with looks bent gloomily upon the ground. What was to be done? There was no other cottage nearer than a mile where she could seek shelter for her poor wounded pet, and she was turning away discouraged, when Elsbeth, who had been listening with an air of entire indifference to what passed, suddenly slipped down from her window-seat, and confronting the young baroness, said, curtly, "I will take care of the deer."

"That is kind and good of you, Elsie!" Beatrice said, much relieved, holding out her hand to the girl in token of gratitude.

But, without choosing to notice the extended hand, Elsbeth

turned away and stooped over the deer, whilst Beatrice dropped her hand with a blush.

The baron had observed the scene in silence. He lightly pressed the rude girl's shoulder.

"Elsbeth, Fräulein von Arning offered to shake hands with you."

She looked up at him with an air of mingled timidity and defiance in her black eyes, but only for a second, and then, as if unwillingly, held out a brown little hand to the baroness.

The atmosphere of the cottage was oppressive. Beatrice hurried out into the fresh air, and Otto closed the door of the hut after him with an energy that seemed inspired by a desire to shut up there all the painful impressions of the last few moments. But the frown upon his brow showed plainly enough that there were no bolts or bars that could confine behind doors of oak the evil spirits which the old woman's words had evoked to torture him.

Beatrice looked at him askance, surmising what was passing in his mind, and when they had again entered the forest she took courage, and began shyly: "Do not look so distressed, Herr von Arning. Why heed the words of a feeble old woman who is known in all the country round to be insane?"

Otto stood still. "Insane!" he repeated, impatiently. "The woman is no more insane than you or I. What she said was clear and comprehensible, and there are many who say likewise. What! has madame your mother not told you a hundred times the tale to which the old hag alluded? And you, can you deny that you believed it?" Beatrice stood covered with confusion, the colour coming and going in her lovely cheeks, and her heart throbbing as if it would burst,—the generous heart which would so gladly have spared the man by her side, guilty or not guilty, the humiliation he had just endured in her presence. She could not tell a falsehood, nor could she assent to his words; that would have been too hard.

Otto regarded her for a moment, awaiting her reply with intense eagerness. In answer to her silence he turned aside with "I knew it."

He walked hastily away, but scarcely had he proceeded half a dozen steps when a new thought seemed to strike him. He turned, and once more approaching the young girl, who was still standing downcast at the edge of the forest where he had left her, he said, in a low, quiet voice,—

"I cannot convince you of my innocence. If I could have obtained any proof of it, at whatever cost, these sixteen years of disgrace had never been. It was not to be. I will not weary you with asseverations. I wish only to remind you of one thing. They say that children, in place of the reason and judgment that so often mislead their elders, possess a keen and unerring instinct, enabling them to distinguish friends from foes. As a child you never looked upon me as your foe. No, do not speak! I do not reproach you with the change. I see now that under the weight of evidence against me none but a *child* could have believed in me. Nevertheless, I entreat you, Beatrice, to call up in your memory, whenever you are tempted to condemn me, the night upon which you crossed the wild moor through storm and rain."

Before Beatrice could recover sufficient composure to raise her eyes, she was alone.

As soon as the door of the moorland cottage had closed upon its distinguished visitors, Elsbeth turned her large eyes all aflame upon old Stina.

"Grandmother," she began, "they say you are wise, and people come to ask you what is going to happen. I only want to know what has happened. Tell me, if you can, what the Buchdorf young lady did before she was born, to give her the right to lie upon cushions of down and be fed with sweetmeats, while you beat me every day and the village children throw stones at me. Or tell me why our baron, who never

speaks to any one, treats the baroness with so much honour although he hates her, while he hardly seems to notice me. She is no prettier, no wiser, no more cunning, than I. Can you tell me why he treats her better?"

"Why?" Stina answered; "why else than because she belongs to his caste? They all hold together. People say there is one law for all. They lie, Els. There are two laws in every land, one for the rich, another for the starving. I learned that in my travels, Els."

"But why should we be among the starving?" Brown Elsie persisted. "I will starve no longer. Can I not be rich, like the baroness?"

The crone wagged her head to and fro. "No, you cannot, Els," she said. "We must stay as we are. But there is one thing better, child, than rank or wealth—*Power!* Did you see how patiently the wild young baron listened to me? Do you think he would have borne it from any one else on earth? No, but he'll bear it from old Stina—oh, yes, child, for I have power, power!"

And as she spoke she cast a glance, half proud, half sly, towards the gaily-painted chest.

CHAPTER X.

MEANWHILE, Aunt Bernhardine, whose parsimony increased with years, was sitting in the simple apartment at Ermsdal, where was spread a supper, awaiting her nephew's return. The bare room, with its sanded floor, dull chintz curtains, and white scoured wooden chairs, did not look at all cosy or inviting. One thing of beauty alone there was to cast a glory over all the bleak surroundings,—the rays of the

setting sun, which fortunately did not own the sway of the prim canoness.

Aunt Bernhardine sat stiff and straight in the black leather chair by the stove, and her knitting-needles clicked in her fingers as busily as on the afternoon when we first made her acquaintance nearly nineteen years ago. Opposite her, at the other end of the table, sat a portly little man who was perpetually moving restlessly upon his seat. as if he could not accommodate himself to its narrow wooden proportions. This visitor was Herr von Tannen, Otto's most faithful friend and admirer, and an old comrade of his father's. All Otto's other neighbours visited Ermsdal only upon special business occasions, but Herr von Tannen came at least twice every week, and refused to be repulsed either by Aunt Bernhardine's chilling reception or by Otto's misanthropical demeanour.

Tannen was not, indeed, compelled when he came to Ermsdal to share the frugal meals provided by the canoness. Arning knew the old gentleman's weakness for the pleasures of the table, and, greatly to Aunt Bernhardine's annoyance, had given strict orders that his friend was always to be suitably entertained. Thus the baron was to-day enabled to divert his attention from old Fräulein von Tretten, who did not particularly interest him, and bestow it upon a most engrossing woodcock and venison steak, which, with a bottle of sherry, presented a very inviting appearance upon the table before him. The conversation, as long as there had been any, had turned upon Otto's return from the capital, and his purchase of the neighbouring property of Repach; but the subject was exhausted, and there had been a long silence, when Otto's firm quick step was heard in the hall.

"Good-evening," he said briefly, almost gruffly, upon entering, throwing his hunting-cap upon the nearest chair; then perceiving the baron, who had sprung up, napkin in hand, to greet him, he added, in a more kindly tone, "Welcome, Tannen."

Without heeding this curt reception the baron exclaimed cordially, "So here you are again, Otto! By Jove, you have a gift for supplying idle people with stuff for conversation! Off yesterday morning, without a word, to the capital, back again at noon to-day with the deed of purchase of Repach in your pocket, and an hour later out hunting, all as if it were no more to you than plucking a handful of daisies. And yet, if you will allow me, Otto—I suppose you know best, but is not the purchase of that property rather imprudent? Repach is a pearl for a hunter, but it will take a deal of hard work to make it a valuable estate."

While Tannen spoke, Otto was divesting himself of his hunter's wallet. "So much the better," he rejoined. "I bought it only because I hoped it would give me some hard work."

"No, no, let us stop working," the old gentleman exclaimed, with vivacity. "You have worked enough for a lifetime; your youth has been spent in working. True, you may look with pride upon what you have done, but are you going on forever adding to your gains? I should think it was time for you to enjoy—— "

"Enjoy what, old friend?" Otto asked, with a shrug, as he took up his rifle to clean and load it ready for the next day.

Meanwhile, Aunt Bernhardine arranged her nephew's plate and glass, and hung his cap upon the wall where it belonged. The canoness could not leave anything, even a pin, out of place.

"I see no result of your hunting to-day," Herr von Tannen said gaily to Otto. "Bad luck, I suppose. Well, it does not often attend your rifle. By the way, I have a piece of news for you, in which I dare swear you will take but small interest, but which I shall nevertheless impart, since I consider it my duty not to allow you to cut yourself off entirely from the

world about you. Your cousin, Frau von Arning, has returned from her travels."

"I know it. I met the young baroness at Repach."

Aunt Bernhardine pricked up her ears.

"Indeed!" Tannen exclaimed. "Chance is sure to be kinder than the wayward obstinacy of foolish mortals. The first meeting for *nine* years!"

"I certainly have great cause to rejoice in the kindness of chance," Otto rejoined, coldly. "It not only arranged our meeting, but provided that it should take place after a fashion that reopened all the old wounds. What game do you think, Tannen, the last bullet from this rifle laid low? The young baroness's pet deer."

"Ami?" Tannen exclaimed in dismay. "I am excessively sorry; the poor child will be inconsolable."

Otto paused with the ramrod half drawn from the rifle-barrel, and turned with a mocking smile to his visitor.

"Oh, indeed? She will be inconsolable," he slowly repeated. "Is that all you have to say? Go to Buchdorf, and Frau von Arning will give you the true version of the affair, and make it clear as sunlight to you that the ball that struck the deer was meant for its mistress. The two were at least twelve yards apart; but, good heavens! what of that? She will probably find some Herr Warne who will swear to it that my want of skill alone sent the bullet so wide of the mark!"

"Otto! Otto!"

The baron started up, and, leaning his rifle in the corner against the wall, walked to the window.

Tannen looked after him with a shake of his head, and then turned with a glance of inquiry to Aunt Bernhardine, whose only reply was a shrug.

In some displeasure he took up his hat. "You are unjust to the baroness and to yourself, Arning," he said.

Otto made no answer.

"I came to ask a favour of you," Tannen began again, "but I see you are not in the mood to listen to me quietly, so I will postpone it to some future time."

Otto came back to the table. His face was calm, his features wore an expression of weariness. "Pray tell me, Tannen, if I can be of service to you in any way," he said.

"I hope to heaven that I may be able to convince you of the desirability of what I propose," the old baron cried, taking fresh courage. "Week after next, Otto, I am going to give a dinner. Yes, now you know what is coming! For years you have been invited to every entertainment, large or small, that has been given at my house, and you have invariably courteously declined to come to me. I think my patience deserves to be crowned with some success."

"You trouble me!" Otto impatiently interrupted him. "Have I not repeatedly explained to you the reasons for my refusals? I am not fit for society, certainly not for the society about here, which believes itself entirely cognizant of my past and tells the wildest tales with regard to my present life. Shall I expose myself to be stared at as if I were some strange animal? If at sight of me there were the slightest whisper, if any one dared to make the faintest allusion to my wretched past, I could not endure it! There would be some dreadful scene, and—that would spoil your pleasant party," he added, interrupting himself.

"My house ought to afford you surety of your safety from all insult," Tannen gravely replied; "and you are entirely mistaken with regard to the sentiments of a society which you have shunned for sixteen years. No one is hostilely disposed towards you; the only one who unfortunately will not yet see how much we all sinned against you—Frau von Arning—will probably not appear, and both you and she will be spared the annoyance of meeting. Come, Otto, be reasonable for once."

"I have never even paid my respects to Madame von Tannen," Otto said, with hesitation.

Tannen saw that the victory was his.

"Two weeks is a long time," he replied. "You can easily repair that omission. And even if you should not observe the formality required by conventionality, we shall never call you to account for it. My wife and daughters think as I do, that a man just re-awakening to social life should not be frightened back to his retirement by too strict an adherence to social etiquette."

Without looking up, Otto held out his hand to his friend.

"You are so considerate of me, Tannen," he said, gently. "Well, I will overcome myself; I will try once more to mingle with my kind. Are you satisfied?"

"More than satisfied! Be sure that better days await you," his friend replied, cordially grasping the proffered hand. "And now farewell for to-day. You are not in the mood for a visit, so I will disturb you no longer."

And the vivacious little baron took his leave as well pleased as if he had gained some great personal advantage.

No invitation had been extended to Aunt Bernhardine, who never left Ermsdal, because she was unwilling to spend the money which it would have cost to provide her with a suitable dress.

It was strange that with all her parsimony she spent a very considerable sum yearly. Any one else except Otto would have been struck by this fact, but the baron paid no attention to what concerned neither himself nor the management of his property.

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Meanwhile, Beatrice had walked slowly home, lost in thought. One short interview with Otto had sufficed to overthrow the barrier of fear, mistrust, and hatred which for nine long years her mother had been striving to build up in

her heart. Every proof of Otto's guilt was powerless to convince her or to lull to sleep her re-awakened faith in him. She took herself to task for her sympathy with one pronounced so unworthy, and yet she could not but believe in him. Where should she turn for certainty on the subject? To the memories of her childhood? She did so; every little circumstance connected with the estranged cousin, every word of Otto's, came thronging to her thoughts.

In the agitation of her mind she avoided meeting any one, she silently slipped past the drawing-room, where she heard her mother speaking with the steward, and ran up-stairs to her own room. Here she shut and bolted the door with a sigh of relief, and throwing herself into a low chair in the deep window-recess, drew around her the heavy curtains, that she might be all alone with her reflections.

About an hour later Lindau returned from his ride; he looked up to the young girl's window, but Beatrice bent her head that she might not be seen and perhaps compelled to reply to a gesture of greeting. Only in answer to the summons to supper did she present herself among the members of the household. As she passed through the drawing-room it occurred to her that there had once hung there on the wall above a lounge a portrait of Otto, the only likeness of him in existence. It was a little pastel drawing representing the young baron at about nine years of age, in a blue velvet tunic, with light hair and dark-blue eyes in which there was already more of a haughty gravity than of childish gaiety. Kurt had often taken it down to show to his little daughter, but when the house had been refurnished it had been banished to a lumber-room, and Beatrice had forgotten it. Now it suddenly arose before her mind's eye in every detail, even to the handle of the riding-whip which the boy held in his hand, and she resolved that though it should cost her a search through every cupboard and closet in the spacious house, she would find this

picture on the morrow and give it a place, not where it had formerly hung, but in her own room.

Bent upon carrying out this resolve, she entered the dining-room where the chandelier was already lighted and the table shone in the splendour of glass and silver. Yes, it looked far more splendid than cosy or comfortable; only four covers laid at the huge table! only four people in the spacious apartment, lighted as if for a ball, with its gigantic side-board and high-backed chairs of carved oak! Beatrice quietly took her seat, and was unusually silent during the entire meal.

Herr von Lindau, on the contrary, was extremely loquacious; he had had a most interesting ride, and he now gave free rein to the eloquence which his "mamma" had so frequently extolled. He began a long story of an old witch and an enchanted princess whom she kept spell-bound in her den, but who nevertheless had given him a cup of water with the prettiest hands in the world. Beatrice scarcely looked up from her plate; she could not help a blush now and then, for she suspected to whom Lindau referred. The baroness, however, listened with unaffected interest until Warne, who sat with downcast eyes performing the masterly feat of keenly watching three people at one and the same moment, remarked in a low tone, "The baron has probably encountered Brown Elsie, as the villagers call her,—Elsbeth Mai, who lives with her grandmother on the Ermsdal moor."

"No, no, not in Ermsdal. I saw 'Repach,' or some name like it upon the milestone."

"You are right," the steward replied; "but the bit of ground upon which the hut stands belongs to Ermsdal, although it is within the boundary of Repach. Old Stina formerly led a wandering life, but more than ten years ago she took up her abode in an Ermsdal hut. Her landlord of course has reasons for allowing her to live there."

"How then? Your disguised princess turns out to be Elsbeth

Mai?" the baroness exclaimed, in surprise. "And is this gipsy girl really handsome?"

Frau von Arning had often seen Brown Elsie during her childhood and girlhood roaming field and forest, but it was one of Theresa's characteristics that she rarely took notice of any human being in rags.

Lindau continued to expatiate upon the charms of his lately-discovered beauty, thereby delighting no one so much as the steward, who had observed the glance, half timid, half searching, with which Beatrice had greeted the first mention of Elsbeth, and had ascribed it to jealousy. Nothing could more entirely accord with his plans than this imprudence upon Lindau's part, and in order to increase the supposed discord thus arising between the young people he skilfully incited the baron to a still greater degree of enthusiasm. But Beatrice neither by look nor word furnished any further food for his suspicions, and Emil, who had been carried away rather by his own eloquence than by Elsbeth's beauty, suddenly changed the topic of his discourse.

"You spoke of Ermsdal, Herr Warne. I saw that name also on a sign-post. The estate belongs also to an Arning,—Otto von Arning, if I do not mistake?"

"You are right," Theresa replied, coldly. "Are you acquainted with its possessor?"

"Not exactly that; our major presented him to us and made much of him. Herr von Arning seems to be an agricultural genius; at least every one says that in an inconceivably short space of time he transformed a barren waste into a very valuable estate, and a swarm of beggars into a prosperous peasantry. This may be an exaggeration."

"A very great exaggeration," the steward remarked.

"No, no, it is the truth!" the baroness, who never consciously gave her support to an untruth, contradicted him. "I knew Ermsdal as it was formerly, and according to the

unanimous testimony of credible eye-witnesses, Herr von Arning has accomplished the impossible."

"So much the better, madame. I am extremely glad to hear the good opinion expressed in the capital concerning him thus confirmed by his neighbours. For a friend, he seems to me too cold, too reserved a man, but he is evidently a person of distinction, and my mamma is always pleased to have me cul tivate people of distinction. To-morrow I will ride over to Ermsdal and——"

"You will greatly oblige me by not doing as you propose, Herr von Lindau," said the baroness.

There was in her voice a tone of rebuke which embarrassed the young man.

"I beg pardon, madame," he stammered. "I did not know—of course if you disapprove——"

"Herr von Arning is a relative of ours," Theresa went on in the same tone.

"Of course! What was I thinking of? The name is the same. It never occurred to me. Excuse me, I pray you, madame, and be assured I shall not transgress your wishes in the matter."

"I am sorry to impose any restraint, however slight, upon your actions," the baroness replied, with her air of loftiest dignity, "but there can be no intercourse between Buchdorf and Ermsdal. Do not misconstrue me, Herr von Lindau. This alienation was caused by no ordinary family disagreement. But perhaps it would be as well frankly to explain the mattter to you."

The knife and fork that Beatrice held jingled slightly. Was she to be condemned to listen to a tale every word of which in her present mood would pain her like the touch of red-hot steel? She arose, and, leaning one hand upon the table, she said, turning her large serious eyes upon her mother,—

"Mamma, Herr von Arning is almost the only relative we have in the world. Would you acquaint a stranger with his unfortunate history,—accuse him to a stranger of a crime which was never proved?"

These were the first words uttered by Beatrice since her appearance at table, and they produced an extraordinary effect. The steward stared at the young girl with eyes wide open for once; the baroness shook her head in some irritation. The outcast's name had never been uttered with such forbearance within the walls of Buchdorf since the death of the old baron.

"These are singular expressions of yours, my dear Beatrice," she said, reprovingly, "expressions not without a shade of offence in them, unintentional on your part I am sure. Herr von Lindau certainly is no stranger, nor, so far as I know, has there been any secret with regard to your cousin's actions. Whence then this sudden sentimentality? Unfortunately you had, as a child, an inconceivable *penchant* for the man, which it cost me much time and pains to eradicate, but I trusted it was entirely overcome. I should be excessively sorry if you were ever to relapse into your childish error. Herr Warne and I have certainly often enough detailed to you the circumstances which afforded incontestable proofs of his guilt."

"Incontestable proofs? The court acquitted him, and papa did not believe him guilty," Beatrice firmly rejoined. While the mother was speaking, the daughter's eyes were never for a moment averted from her face, and something in their expression and in the pale earnest countenance told Theresa that for some reason, whatever it might be, Beatrice was not to be ruled to-day. There never must be anything like a dispute between them. She shrugged her shoulders, and, rising from table, said, with her most pacific air, "Herr von Lindau is to finish reading us that interesting article this evening, is he not? Wait for me, children; I will be with you in a few minutes. I

am only going for some papers which I wish to hand to Herr Warne."

And with a graceful inclination she left the room.

The others, with varied emotions, betook themselves to the drawing-room. Lindau sat down at the grand piano, and rattled away at a waltz with considerably more mistakes than usual. He was dying of curiosity to know something more of the mysterious lord of Ermsdal.

Beatrice sat in a window-recess, looking out at the starlit heavens, mechanically searching for the constellations with which she was familiar, and wondering whether Lindau could possibly know of her meeting with her cousin. At another window stood the steward, also lost in his own reflections. He was vainly endeavouring to harmonize his two discoveries, Beatrice's jealousy of Elsbeth, and her sudden partisanship for Otto. This last could not possibly in a girl of her character have been the result of irritation against Lindau and a wild desire to speak of him contemptuously as a stranger. No, no, its cause lay much deeper. "And even if it is to be found only at the earth's centre I will know it," Warne said to himself, in conclusion of his reverie. Meanwhile he would carry out the plan he had formed of separating the young people at all hazards. To this end he would jestingly direct the young baroness's attention to some of her adorer's follies. He had studied human nature sufficiently to know that a fault of character is more readily forgiven than a weakness.

Noiselessly he approached the young girl.

"Will you not let me ask to have the reading begin now?" he asked, with a glance towards the piano; "in pity to your nerves, Fräulein von Arning. The will is good, but the capacity is small."

Beatrice smiled good-humouredly. "Do not stop him, Herr Warne," she said, kindly. "It gives him pleasure, and really it does not annoy me much."

The baroness entered, Lindau began to read, and the evening passed quietly.

The next day Beatrice was very busy. First she found her cousin's portrait and concealed it in her most private drawer. Then she unlocked her father's antique secretary and began to peruse carefully every paper it contained, hoping to find some evidence in Otto's favour. Her mother made no remark upon her conduct, supposing it to be prompted by a sudden access of filial affection. Her search, however, was entirely fruitless.

She found many affectionate expressions, it is true, with regard to Otto, in her father's handwriting, showing his confidence in his young relative, but nothing that would have given an impartial observer any decisive evidence in Otto's favour.

In the afternoon Beatrice visited many of the cottagers with whom she had been upon terms of affectionate intimacy in her childhood. As if by chance, she led them to speak of old times, and she was not a little surprised to find the opinion prevailing among them very different from that entertained in her home. The present prosperity of the Ermsdalers, who in former times were driven by destitution to make large demands every winter upon the richer peasantry of the neighbouring estates, had impressed these simple people, accustomed to judge by facts, most favourably, and disposed them to espouse the cause of their former "young master." Of course they did not frankly avow their change of sentiment, but it was not difficult for Beatrice to divine from what they said their true opinion.

During the following days she continued her investigations, with the same result. Every morning also, long before the baroness arose, she visited the moorland hut to see her wounded deer, which improved daily. This went on for a week, and Beatrice was seldom in the house except at meal-times and in

the evenings. The mother paid little heed to this whim, as she thought it, of her daughter; but Herr von Lindau was driven to desperation by the constant absence of his ideal. In spite of the old gardener's remonstrances, he robbed the greenhouses of their choicest treasures, and at night Beatrice would find her cherished blossoms tied into a huge nosegay lying fading on the floor of her bedroom, hurled there through the open window by Emil, and almost always accompanied by a copy of verses lamenting, in rather halting rhymes, the invisibility of his sun, his star, or his rose, while he was doomed to tread the earth alone.

In all this he was assisted and abetted by Warne, who laughed in his sleeve the while, for he knew that Beatrice could not endure the wanton destruction of her favourites, and detested bad verses.

CHAPTER XI.

Mother Stina was thought a skilful fortune-teller, and the peasants listened to her as to an oracle. And people who were not superstitious often secretly consulted her. For, even if she could not foretell the future, she was intimately acquainted with a thousand private circumstances connected with people of all ranks in the country round, and was quite willing for a consideration to afford exact intelligence concerning the present, which should surely be enough for any reasonable man.

Warne had often been of this latter number. However successfully he might oppose Lindau's views, he felt himself powerless in face of the vague danger that undeniably menaced him in Beatrice's unaccountable change of sentiment towards

her cousin. Perhaps old Stina might help him to a solution of this riddle. And then he had another plan. In order to make Lindau quite harmless, he would bring about some entanglement between the young man and Brown Elsie, or at least some appearance of such entanglement.

Thus one evening, when the household at Buchdorf had betaken themselves to rest, when the dogs were unchained in the court-yard, and the full moon was mirrored in the lake beside the sleeping swans, Warne walked noiselessly along the forest paths towards the moorland hut. Silence reigned around him, the birds had long been sleeping in their nests, the stillness was broken only now and then by the eerie cry of the night-owl. On the strip of meadow between the wood and the moor, however, the shrill chirp of the cricket disturbed the air, and the frogs were croaking in the neighbouring marsh. Like some uneasy ghost the steward glided across the moonlit clearing, and slipped easily through the opening of the door of the hut, which stood ajar. He might have opened it wide, but it was one of Warne's habits never to open a door wider than would suffice to admit of his entrance. The moonlight, however, reigned alone in the interior of the hut; neither of its inmates was to be found there; and leaving it in some irritation at having taken his midnight walk in vain, Warne was about to retrace his steps, when he started back with an involuntary exclamation of surprise and admiration.

In the tall blooming heather, almost at his feet, lay Elsbeth Mai in her fantastic dress, her small head propped upon her brown, shapely arm, and a wreath of scarlet hawthorn hips twined about her raven hair. Her other hand lay caressingly upon the graceful head of a deer that was nestling affectionately beside her, and the moon was mirrored in her large dark eyes, now gazing towards the skies with an expression full of melancholy and entirely devoid of the cunning and the distrustful defiance that usually characterized her. She was indeed, as

Herr von Lindau had declared, a fairy-like apparition, and the steward might well pause before her in admiration.

"Elsbeth!" he exclaimed, "what have you been doing to yourself? I never saw you so beautiful before!"

She did not alter her position in the least, but the old evil expression fell like a veil over her lovely features.

"Where is your grandmother, Elsbeth?" Warne continued, perceiving that the girl was not inclined to reply to his first address.

Brown Elsie motioned carelessly in the direction of the moor; but when the steward, instead of departing at this mute sign, remained standing before her, she said, impatiently, "Mother Stina is out on the moor, where the devil teaches her magic, and she will not come home until morning. So if you have another scrap of paper in your pocket like the one you brought last year, and many another year before that, give it to me, for heaven's sake. My grandmother shall have it unread, I promise you, for I cannot read."

The steward sat down beside her in the fragrant heather. Elsbeth made a gesture of impatience.

"Well?" she asked, turning to him with a stare of surprise. "Did I not tell you that my grandmother would not be home until morning?"

Warne nevertheless persisted. "And why should that prevent our having a little conversation together?" he said, calmly. "What have you twined among your hair, child? Hawthorn hips? Admirable! The fiery scarlet is most becoming to your olive skin. Would you like me to buy you a coral necklace, Elsbeth, and a fine new gown?"

"You? For me?" Brown Elsie started up, but, immediately sinking back again, she said, in an offensively indifferent tone, "Oh, yes, I always forget that you are a rich man, Herr Warne. You inherited money from your father 'now in bliss,' as the Herr Pastor says—'tis a fine thing—such a

father!" She slowly plucked to pieces a heather blossom. "I wonder if your father really is in bliss, Herr Warne?"

The steward bit his lip and shot an angry glance from beneath his drooping eyelids at the delicate creature beside him who dared to speak so boldly and mockingly. "What do you mean?" he asked.

The head of the strange girl sank back among the heather, and there was no possible meaning to be gathered from the placid, almost stupid expression of her features, as she replied, sleepily, "Why, the pastor says that the striving for gain and gold does not lead directly to bliss. But what of that? All I know is, your father left you money. I wish my grandmother would be so kind."

The steward breathed freely again, but he still glanced suspiciously at the girl. "What you say sounds very heartless," he said, slowly.

"I have no heart," Elsbeth assented. "Why or for whom should I have any? Has not every one mocked, and beaten, and despised me ever since I can remember? And I hate them all,—the whole world! But I will be rich and powerful, and then have my revenge."

Warne was not slow to take advantage of the mood these words disclosed in this untutored, almost savage nature. He began with wily words to give point and direction to her vague discontents,—painted the impression which her beauty although clouded by poverty had made upon the young officer Emil von Lindau, spoke of the brilliant future that her personal advantages ought to secure for her, and of Emil's wealth,—all in an easy way, as though it had been suddenly suggested to him by her unexpected presence. He desired but to give the first impetus to the stone; it would roll fast enough down hill without further help.

In his own eyes his discourse was a masterpiece; and the manner in which Elsbeth listened to his words, her head bent

as if in shy pleasure, was well fitted to make him sure of their effect. But when, with a jest upon the conquest she had made, and an added wish that her rise in life might be speedy, he would have laid his hand caressingly upon his "little friend's" graceful head, the girl slipped from him with a lithe celerity that justified one of her nicknames, that of lizard, and springing to her feet stood before the startled man the next instant with folded arms, her eyes full of gloomy menace.

"Soh, Herr Warne!" she said, slowly; "I have listened to all you had to say, because I wanted to know exactly what fine plot you were hatching, and for whom. Now I know it as well as if I had made it myself; and you also, my fine gentleman, as perfectly as I know my beloved moor out there, with its soft mossy surface above, and its bottomless mud below. When you sat down by me and spoke kindly to me I knew you wanted something of me; when you offered me coral and a new gown I knew it must be something great, for you never give more than half pay for service done. Oh, you need not be angry. I praise you when I say so, for if you were a spendthrift how could *your father* have left you so much money?"

She gave a short scornful laugh, and then went on in a lower tone, in which, in spite of her effort to appear indifferent, there was a tremor of acute pain. "You would deceive me,—so meanly, so hatefully; no other girl would forgive you; but Brown Elsie has always been used to be ill treated. I wish you no worse than I do the whole world, but rather better, for in your scheme my ruin was not your object; you only wanted to bring to grief the haughty ladies at Buchdorf. You hate them as I do, those rich, great people, only I cast my hatred boldly in their faces, while you humbly kiss the ground before them. Look you, Warne," the girl went on more quietly, "I knew you were only jeering me a while

ago when you called me clever. But indeed I know many a thing that you will not find in books, and that may chance to be useful to you. For five miles around here there is not a house that holds a secret from me, Brown Elsie. It is I who supply Mother Stina with the knowledge that makes the stupid people who come to her stare, and although I am not made to be your humble servant as my grandmother is, heaven knows why, I will give you faithful help against the girl at Buchdorf, if for once in your life you can keep faith."

"But, my dear child," the steward cried, delightedly, "did I ask anything of you but your friendly aid? If my scheme does not suit you, improve it if you can. I came hither to ask your advice."

"Your scheme is bad, and, besides, useless," Elsbeth replied. "The Fräulein will never be Lindau's wife."

"But the early morning walks," Warne said, as if to himself.

"You know of those too? Nothing escapes those half-shut eyes of yours. Swear to me that the coral necklace shall be mine, and a hat just like the one with a wreath of water-lilies that your Fräulein wears, and I will tell you what those walks are for."

"Why should I swear, Elsbeth? All these you shall surely have."

"Can I be sure of that? I shall be more sure if you swear, for you are superstitious, my dear Herr Warne; for instance, you are not fond of the cry of the cuckoo,—not even when it comes from a cuckoo-clock. If you do not keep your promise I will dog your heels and cry 'cuckoo!' I know how to do it,—'cuckoo! cuckoo!'"

The cry was so natural that the steward started and looked around. Elsbeth laughed.

"I swear, then," he said, peevishly. "I swear by all that is holy. And now, tell me quickly."

"Listen, then. Last Friday a week ago, Fräulein Beatrice came here with our master——"

"With your master! Are you dreaming, Elsbeth? With Otto von Arning?" the steward cried.

Elsbeth nodded. "I know enough to see how very unpleasant it would be for you, who have played the master in Buchdorf so long and so well, to let him have a sight of your cards. Never mind, I will tell you how to prevent it. So the two came to our hut; he brought the deer which he had wounded, and they wanted granny to nurse it. But she would do nothing but talk about a time that the Herr Baron does not like much to think of, and he grew furious, and the Fräulein looked as if it were all her fault. Afterwards,—a knot-hole in the door is a good thing after all,—afterwards I saw them stand together for a while on the edge of the forest. Now she comes every day to visit her deer, but she scarcely looks at it, and talks all the while of him; and he comes every day to bandage Ami's wound, which is of no consequence, and I must tell him all she has said. She comes in the morning, and he towards evening, and glad enough they would be to meet. Neither of them has yet plucked up the heart for that, but it will come all in good time, and then—— Now I have earned your gift. Good-night, Herr Warne."

At this sudden conclusion, Warne started as from a dream. "Elsbeth!" he exclaimed, but she was gone. With the speed of lightning her little brown feet tripped through the luxuriant heather; on the edge of the moor she turned with a mocking laugh that showed her white teeth glistening in the moonlight, and beckoned to the steward to follow her. Nothing would have induced Warne to do so; even Ami stood mournfully on the edge of the swamp, while Elsbeth, seeming scarcely to touch the earth, flew over the marshy ground in a fantastic dance.

The moor was her fortress, her garden, her home. Thither

as a child she had fled from the blows and stones of the village boys. There she was safe, for the boldest among them dared not follow her. But she knew every foot of soil in her home, every dangerous and every safe spot; she was the spirit of the desert waste, her character had taken its colouring from its desolate features; she should have been called, not moorland Els, but moorland Elf.

The oracle which the steward had thus consulted gave him food for thought. Elsbeth's revelations accorded wonderfully with Beatrice's behaviour on that Friday evening; but when he reflected upon the state of affairs at Buchdorf, upon Frau von Arning's detestation of Otto and her evident determination to consider Emil von Lindau as her future son-in-law, he almost doubted the accuracy of Elsbeth's powers of observation. It annoyed him, too, that she had so easily read his thoughts; if by the merest chance his scheme had not coincided with her own views his position would have been lost.

Thus he pondered restlessly until sleep closed his eyelids, and when he awoke from troubled dreams the sun was high in the heavens. The doubts of the previous night still weighed heavily upon his soul. Vexed and wearied, he opened his window and looked out. Before him lay the park in all the dewy freshness of morning, and the bells chiming softly from the village church told that Sunday had come in all this brilliant splendour of earth and sky. From the terrace below, he caught the flutter of the baroness's light dress beside the breakfast-table. Crowds of hungry doves, crows, and sparrows were perched upon the boughs of the trees just beyond the terrace. The rogues knew well enough the hour when Beatrice scattered crumbs for them, and there between the beds bright with stocks and asters stood the beneficent fairy herself, in her pure white morning dress and the hat wreathed with water-lilies which had aroused Elsbeth's envy. How glad and gay she looked! How merrily she laughed at

Herr von Lindau's clumsy attempts to skip across the flower-beds to meet her! In Warne's eyes she seemed an angel of light encircled by a halo of peace and purity, contrasted with the mocking vision of the night flitting in the moonlight across the desert moorland.

"And that lovely creature I am supposed to hate?" he muttered to himself. "Brown Elsie's boasted penetration fails her indeed if she can imagine such hatred possible."

CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY was nearing its close when Otto paid his daily visit to the invalid in the moorland hut. He tied his horse to the crooked birch-tree, and approached Brown Elsie, who was crouching among the heather on the edge of the swamp, while Ami, at a short distance, was cropping his evening meal from the few patches of grass he was able to find. Elsbeth had propped her head, now adorned with a garland of yellow marigolds, upon both hands, and her large eyes, undimmed by any attention to reading or writing, were gazing fixedly at the setting sun, that hovered, a ball of dull crimson fire, just above the horizon of the moor.

"What are you thinking of, Elsbeth?" Arning asked, kindly, touching her shoulder as he spoke.

She turned at his touch without testifying any surprise, and said, in the dreamy, vaguely mysterious way peculiar to her at times, "I am looking at the sun. They say it is now going to another country, called America, where the grain grows of itself, and no one need strive or work hard. There are no rich and poor there, but all are equal and all are happy."

The baron stood surprised at her reply. "My poor child,

who put that into your head?" he asked. "There is hard work everywhere, and want and misery on the other side of the earth as well as here."

She shook her head incredulously. "You never were there," she said, "but the man who told me came from there, and wanted to take us back with him, years ago, when we were in the large town on the water. He was a very grand gentleman, and very kind, but grandmother would not go with him, although I wanted to, oh, so much!"

"Your fine castles in the air would have been lamentably destroyed," the baron rejoined. "And be sure," he added, with a melancholy smile, "that any one who means honestly and is in earnest can find constant occupation in any country; it will not, it is true, make a paradise around him, but it will give him some degree of content. Remember your grandmother, Elsie; you must stay here for her sake; she is old and weak, and will soon be entirely dependent upon your care."

Elsbeth did not reply, except by a scornful glance.

Meanwhile, Otto had unwound the bandage from the limb of the wounded deer.

"Our patient is nearly well," he said, cheerfully. "Fräulein von Arning will be very grateful to you for the care you have taken of Ami."

Moorland Elsie dreamed no longer; she was once more the same mocking, malicious sprite whom the steward had seen on the previous night.

"Oh, yes," she drawled, without turning her eyes from the sun, "only—a few weeks ago she would have been more grateful still."

"A few weeks ago?" Otto repeated. "What do you mean by that, my girl?"

"Oh, everything is different when one has a sweetheart——"

The deer jumped aside; his physician had touched the wound less gently than usual, but Otto possessed enough self-control to appear indifferent.

"A sweetheart?" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "You are dreaming, Elsbeth! Are you speaking of Fräulein von Arning?"

"If it is a secret, I will keep it," said Elsbeth, quite innocently. "You, her cousin, of course know that she is betrothed to Herr von Lindau. I saw it when they first came here together and Ami got only one glance for every three bestowed upon him. Is it not natural, Herr Baron?"

Brown Elsie now turned; the last glimmering spark of the sun's disk had vanished, and with it every trace of cheerfulness from the baron's countenance.

"Yes, perfectly natural," he replied, mechanically. "I see that Ami is more nearly recovered than I thought possible. You need not expect me for the next few days."

Elsbeth had approached the deer. She now stared the baron in the face for a moment, and then burst into an insolent laugh.

"Els! Els!" her grandmother's shrill voice was heard calling from the hut. Elsbeth paid no heed, but laughed on.

Her bold merriment grated upon the baron. He put a force upon himself to ask, quietly, "What amuses you, Elsbeth?"

"Oh, I am only pleased. They are such a handsome couple, Herr von Lindau and the young Fräulein. Do you not think so, Herr Baron?"

"Doubtless—— Good-night, Elsbeth."

Arning untied his horse and sprang into the saddle. The noble animal reared and curveted, unaccustomed to feel as now both whip and spur. For an instant it stood nearly upright upon its hind legs, and then plunged madly into the depths of the forest, where horse and rider were instantly lost to sight.

"Els! Els! Curse you, girl, do you not hear me?" old Stina screamed, still more shrilly.

"I'm coming, granny, I'm coming," Elsbeth at last deigned to reply, approaching the hut slowly and loiteringly. "What is it?" she asked, looking in at the little window.

"Come here! come in, you——" And a flood of abuse followed.

Elsbeth leaned with both arms upon the window-sill and screamed in chorus, in which also the black cat joined, for his young mistress had unintentionally thrust him from his seat.

At the sound of her favourite's cries the old woman ceased scolding with a gasp, and the brown imp outside scrambled in at the window, saying, pettishly, "Here I am; and now talk sense, if you want an answer."

"Why do you not come when your feeble old grandmother calls?" the hag asked, coughing. "All my breath has gone. You will bring me to my grave. And all because of the crazy Ermsdaler baron! Have I not his proud aunt and himself too in my power? Did I not show you the other day that I can treat him as I please?"

"He has small reason to praise my kindness," Elsbeth observed, maliciously. "But no matter for that. I like the Herr Baron, and you shall not abuse him."

In fact, Otto's bold, commanding manner had impressed the girl as few things upon earth impressed her. Nevertheless, she did not for one moment hesitate to give him pain in the gratification of her hatred of the Buchdorf Fräulein, and in her love of intrigue which had come to be second nature to her.

The old woman lay back in her chair breathless and panting; the cat jumped up in her lap.

"You must not vex me, Els," she groaned. "I am a feeble old woman, sick too—this cursed cough,—but I am not dying; no, no, far from it," she said, with energy, sitting

upright. "Do you hear? far from it. Do not think it, my girl. The doctor is a fool if he says so. Town doctors are always fools. And he did not say that I was dying, either. Eh? my little Els, my girl of gold; he did not say that?"

Elsbeth shrugged her shoulders impatiently and sat down upon the wooden bench by the window.

"I shall be all right in the winter," the old woman went on. "I was always better by the stove than out in the sunshine. Dear, dear! the sun has set already, and the burgomaster's Lisbeth is coming to-day. Quick, Els,—what have you found out about her and Steffen?"

"A great deal, granny," was the reply; "but I am tired of running about for you day and night, that you may make the stupid peasants stare, while I get nothing in return. In three days I am going to the Ermsdal 'Kirmess.' I want money for a new petticoat, and I will not tell you a word unless you give me two thalers."

The old woman uttered a cry as if her grandchild had struck her.

"Two thalers!" she repeated. "As if I had two thalers! I have no money, Els. Your grandmother is a poor old beggar, who does not know where to get even a plate of potatoes for your daily meal."

"Why do you tell me such nonsense?" Elsbeth said, peevishly. "I suppose you thought I was sleeping, but I saw and heard too the other night when you were counting out the gold pieces you always bring from Ermsdal." And going over to the painted box, she rattled at its lid, and continued, "Here in this chest which you always keep fast locked you have plenty of money."

Her words threw her grandmother into another rage. She started up, brandishing her spindle in the air as if she would have felled the girl to the earth.

"Oho!" Elsbeth slowly ejaculated. "The times are past,"

and her eyes flashed, "when you could beat me. Have a care, granny!"

The withered hand dropped the spindle. "Cursed brat," the crone hissed, in a voice stifled with fury, "you shall not anger me, or I shall die; and I will not die! Yes, God of heaven," she cried, raising her hands in a kind of savage ecstasy, "you are just. In punishment for my sins you have cursed my old age with this devil in human form in place of a loving child——"

"Yes, a devil!" Elsbeth repeated; "for I am what your blows have made me! And now give me the money!"

"Yes," gasped the old woman, "you shall have the money, Els; but it will bring you no blessing."

"Let the blessing go; but be quick!" was the insolent reply.

Mother Stina sank back into her chair, and drew from the chaos of folds in her dress a worn leather purse, whence she began to count out in pennies and groschen the sum desired, moaning as she did so so piteously that the black cat stopped licking his bruises and stared compassionately into his mistress's face.

Elsbeth negligently took the money and counted it before she began to tell what she had promised. Scarcely had she spoken the first words when there was heard a low, peculiar tap upon the door of the hut, and her grandmother bade her be silent.

"Quick, Els," she whispered, "light the lamp and close the shutters. Then open the door and go, and if Lisbeth comes say I am not at home."

The girl obeyed the first part of this command without delay, and soon the feeble rays of a tallow candle mingled with the dying light of day within the hut; but Elsbeth did not withdraw.

"I know very well," she said, "that the rats are waiting

outside for the paper bait which you hang out every year for the steward, grandmother. And I am no longer a child to be sent out of the way. I must know what game my good friend Warne is playing——"

"Go, Els, go; you cannot stay here," her grandmother begged her, almost gently.

Elsbeth's naked foot stamped impatiently upon the clay floor of the hut. "I shall stay," she replied, defiantly. "You do not know what I am about with the steward. Hush, granny! I shall stay, and woe to you if you betray me!"

In less than a minute the girl had climbed upon the high bed and drawn the curtains close, leaving only a small chink through which she could see all that went on in the hut. The crone sighed profoundly, closed the window, and then hobbled upon her crutch to the door. The visitor, whom Mother Stina received with a low curtsy, was a bent, shabbily-dressed individual, muffled past all recognition in cloak and wraps. When, however, the door was closed behind him, he threw his disguise aside and stood revealed as our old acquaintance the usurer, Moses Aaron, from M——.

After a quarter of an hour he took his leave, a folded paper in his pocket, and Mother Stina, with trembling hands, loosened a stone in the hearth and hid beneath it a packet of bank-notes. Elsbeth never betrayed her presence by the slightest breath, although her curiosity reaped a richer harvest than she had hoped for.

In the course of the evening, at stated intervals, two other usurers from M—— presented themselves, and were received by the moorland hag in the same manner. At ten o'clock, however, all was dark and still in the hut. The window stood wide open, and the moonlight shone full upon the bed. There lay old Stina, her breath coming quick and loud in uneasy slumber. But Elsbeth stood for a long while beside the sleeping crone, her delicate brows knit in a gloomy frown, gazing

out upon the moor, beautiful, menacing, implacable, like an avenging angel by the bedside of a dying sinner.

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Meanwhile, Aunt Bernhardine was sitting in her black leathern arm-chair, beside the solitary tallow candle, which was all that she, not one whit more extravagant than Mother Stina, was wont to burn. Her knitting lay in her lap, and her weary head was sunk upon her breast, for she had been, as ever, busy since the dawn of day, and midnight was now not far distant. She had a piece of news for Otto, and would not go to rest without seeing him.

She heard the village clock strike twelve, and soon afterward the watch-dog began to bark, and the clatter of a horse's hoofs resounded in the court-yard.

The canoness listened. She heard Otto tap with his riding-whip on the window of the hostler's room and immediately afterwards enter the house, where, contrary to his custom, he strode past the sitting-room and went directly to his own apartment.

Fräulein von Tretten waited a moment longer, and then, with a shake of her head, she took the candle, and going into the hall opened the door and descended the two steps that led to the court-yard. There she found one groom leading Otto's horse up and down to cool, and another standing by, sleepy and yawning, while the red light of a stable-lantern contended feebly with the silver rays of the moon. Usually when Otto returned thus late he quietly led his horse to the stable himself, without arousing the men.

"What," the canoness asked herself, "was the use of his wakening these men, who need all the sleep they can get to make them fit for the morrow's work?"

"What is the matter, Philip?" she said, aloud, holding her hand before the flame of her candle.

"Will the Fräulein only take the trouble to look at Castor?"

one of the men replied, pointing to the horse, which was covered with foam. "One half-hour longer, and there would have been little use in leading him up and down. I don't know what the matter is. The Herr Baron usually takes such good care of his horses; we never are allowed to overweight them; and just look at this! Where can he have been?"

"That is no affair of yours," the canoness said, severely, turning towards the house again. "See that the horse takes no harm, and be quiet."

She was quite above allowing the servants to discuss their master's conduct in her presence, but she lacked the delicacy of feeling which would have granted him the solitude that he so evidently desired. What she had to tell also goaded her; there is for many of us a strange charm in the telling of a piece of unpleasant news. Therefore she slowly ascended the stairs and opened the door of Otto's study. It was dark and empty. She crossed the little room and knocked at the opposite door: no answer. She laid her hand upon the latch: the door was locked.

"Otto!" she cried, impatiently.

"Good-night, aunt," came by way of reply.

But the canoness was not to be thus repulsed. "What does this mean?" she asked, half in anger, half in entreaty. "You have been galloping about the woods until midnight, and have not come in to see me. Your horse is in a dreadful condition. What is the matter? If anything has happened, tell me what it is. Do not keep up this perpetual reserve! Answer me, Otto! You are not ill?" she added, when Otto still kept silent.

"I am not ill," Arning answered, at last, "and nothing extraordinary has happened; but I pray you, my dear aunt, excuse me for to-day; I am very tired. To-morrow I will talk with you as long as you please."

The canoness looked searchingly around for fear of listeners,

and then said to her nephew, in an undertone, "Tannen has been here with some bad news. Will you wait until to-morrow to hear it?"

"Oh, no!" wearily; "speak."

"I can hardly credit it, but he asserts that Beatrice is to be betrothed to a Herr von Lindau, a mere boy, twenty-one years of age, whom her mother has in training for her."

"She *is* betrothed to him."

"Is betrothed!" Aunt Bernhardine repeated. "Already? Oh, now I understand it all. Indeed you have good cause for anxiety, my poor Otto. If this be so the property is lost forever!"

The canoness heard her nephew spring up impatiently. "The property!" he exclaimed, passionately. "The property! I pray you to leave me in peace, Aunt Bernhardine!"

Involuntarily she retreated from the door. "Good heavens, Otto, be reasonable!" she said; "I cannot mean to trouble you. Surely I have given proof sufficient that I have your welfare more at heart than my own. It cannot be my fault that Buchdorf is lost to you."

And she left the room, not indeed to sleep,—this confirmation of her worst forebodings affected her too deeply. In the chamber above her own she heard the baron pace to and fro the whole night long. There was no repose for him either. In the few hours that had elapsed since Elsbeth's malicious announcement he had probed the depths of his heart as never before during the long sixteen years of apparent calm—the calm of frozen waters—spent at Ermsdal. Had he not always attributed the cold indifference with which upon his visits to the capital he had regarded all women, even the most lovely, to the bitter experiences of his youth that had robbed him forever of the capacity for affection? Now he knew that it was the imperishable image of a child—a mere child—that had made any later impression upon his heart impossible; a child,

too, whom he had treated with but scant kindness, and had imagined he could hate. Elsbeth's words had dissipated the carefully guarded illusion of years.

"Good God!" he groaned, "must this girl drag me through every phase of mortal anguish? One blessing, however, is the result of this alienation," he continued, pursuing another train of thought, "I shall not, as her guardian, be forced myself to place her hand in that of another."

By degrees he grew calmer. In the heart beating within these four walls how many a bitter conflict had raged,—conflicts never dreamed of by those who saw the grave, silent man steadfastly engaged in the performance of each day's task.

When the first dawn of day appeared through his uncurtained windows the baron hurriedly changed his dress, and half an hour afterwards he was in the court-yard, giving orders for the day to the throng of labourers and servants. No one noticed any alteration in his demeanour, no one guessed that he had just consigned to oblivion the fairest vision of his life,—the last of his youth. Aunt Bernhardine alone believed that she understood him, and could not comprehend why Otto, who knew how thoroughly she shared his grief, should never by a single word refer to the conversation of the previous night.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE morning of Herr von Tannen's dinner had arrived, a fair, sunny September morning. Frau von Arning, in compliance with her daughter's urgent entreaties, had consented to be present, and she was, it can readily be understood, looking forward with a certain degree of agitation to meeting the relative whom she both dreaded and hated.

Beatrice, no less although more agreeably agitated, spent the morning in her room. The steward was busy in the court-yard. The only person entirely at ease on this day was Herr von Lindau, who sat in one of the wide-windowed recesses of the drawing-room, covering a light wooden fan of the young baroness's with blue dots, which Beatrice laughingly assured him might really, with the assistance of a brilliant imagination, pass for forget-me-nots. A servant announced that the carriage was in readiness, and Beatrice made her appearance in a rich dress of delicate pink silk, with diamonds about her throat, on her arms, and in her chestnut hair. By a tacit agreement upon the subject of the toilet between mother and daughter, the latter wore simple muslins except upon festal occasions like the present, and then she consented to gratify Theresa's maternal pride by appearing in all the magnificence of the heiress.

As she entered, Herr von Lindau arose, and with a well-turned compliment presented her with the fan which he had just completed. The maid packed the carriage with plaids and wraps, parasols and umbrellas, and Frau von Arning urged every one to haste and saw that nothing was forgotten. At last the ladies took their places, and Lindau insisted upon

driving and yielding his place inside the barouche to Herr Warne.

Theresa was prevailed upon to consent. Warne took his place opposite her upon the back seat, while the young officer triumphantly took the reins.

For a while all went well. Beatrice complimented the guest upon his unexpected skill, and Frau von Arning conquered her fears sufficiently to take out the newspapers which were to furnish amusement during the long drive. Beatrice also took up a paper, and Warne diligently scanned the fields on either side of the road.

Thus about an hour passed. The carriage was just ascending quite a steep hill, when Beatrice, pointing to an article in her paper, exclaimed, "Mamma, did you know that Herr von Arning was a famous physician?"

"At least I knew that he studied medicine for a long time," Theresa replied, with a shrug. She had just succeeded in banishing the coming meeting from her mind, and it was exceedingly unpleasant to have it thus recalled.

"Yes, but he has become famous," Beatrice persisted. "Just read the praises lavished here upon one of his medical essays; it has gained a prize."

"Really, Beatrice," her mother coldly interrupted her, "I cannot see what possible interest Herr von Arning's medical capacity can possess for us."

"Excuse me, my dear mother, but his medical capacity seems to me to be the very thing which should interest us," Beatrice eagerly rejoined. She spoke hurriedly, and her cheeks glowed. "You have often told me how, during your stay in Italy with papa, Herr von Arning took every possible means, short of open violence, to—well, yes, I can find no other word for it—to bring about my death. Still, while he was in Buchdorf I not only did not decline in health, but I grew perfectly well; and certainly, if he is so skil-

ful a physician, that cannot have taken place against his will."

The steward pricked up his ears, and Theresa held her haughty head erect, but the reproof she would have uttered died upon her lips in a cry of terror.

The carriage had meanwhile reached the summit of the hill, and Lindau, whose attention was entirely absorbed by the conversation behind him, was thoughtless enough to allow the horses to begin the descent of the steep declivity at a brisk trot, which naturally soon became a rapid gallop. Theresa's scream first reminded Emil of what he was doing, and then, to repair his error, he tugged so furiously at the reins that the foam upon the poor animals' bits was soon flecked with blood, and they grew wild with fright.

Frau von Arning, half fainting with terror, clung to the cushions of the carriage, but Beatrice sprang up, her eyes flashing—not with fear, the road was perfectly good, and besides she was used to tearing down hill in her pony-wagon when her mother was not with her,—but she could not bear to see her favourites so cruelly ill-treated.

"Loosen the reins, Herr von Lindau," she cried, imperiously, in a voice trembling with anger.

But the steward, with much coolness, clambered in an instant upon the box, and, pushing the young baron aside without ceremony, seized the reins. The horses instantly recognized the accustomed hand, and Theresa was partially reassured, although of course the carriage could not be immediately stopped.

At last, however, they reached the valley, and all descended for a while to recover from the fright they had experienced. Lindau humbly offered his arm to Theresa, but she read the repentant sinner such a severe lecture that he slipped away and meekly stood by Beatrice, who was standing petting the tired horses and feeding them with the sugar she always

provided for Herr von Tannen's macaw. The poor young fellow was scarcely better received in this quarter. In fact, the only contented member of the party was Herr Warne.

"These last ten minutes," he reflected in high glee, "have lost this exemplary young baron more ground in the estimation of the lovely heiress than he can regain in six months. The Fräulein is almost fonder of animals than of our noble human kind. She will not soon forgive him the blood on those horses' bits."

After a short rest they took the road again, and soon came in sight of the comfortable old mansion of Wingen. Theresa involuntarily pressed her hand to her heart, and could not refrain from saying, "Indeed I should be glad if something at the last moment prevented Otto von Arning from coming to this dinner."

"But why, mamma dear?" asked Beatrice. "I would venture to wager that our cousin will meet you with all the courtesy you could desire."

"By your leave, Fräulein von Arning, that seems to me by no means certain," the steward remarked, looking over his shoulder from the box where he was seated. He knew that his words harmonized with Theresa's thoughts, and this emboldened him. "The Herr Baron can no more than yourself have forgotten what has happened, and it is, besides, hardly to be expected that sixteen years' of struggle for daily bread, in constant and familiar intercourse with peasants and labourers, will have made his manner more courteous than it used to be."

"A struggle for daily bread?" Beatrice repeated, incredulously. "You exaggerate unpardonably, Herr Warne. You will shortly tell me, I suppose, that Cousin Otto was in danger of starving."

"And if I did, it would not be very wide of the truth," the steward replied, calmly. "Herr von Arning not only inhabited a crumbling ruin, as you well know, Fräulein Beatrice,

but I have learned from credible witnesses that in the first years of his residence at Ermsdal he frequently scarcely had a piece of dry bread for supper. Madame your mother will confirm what I say."

"Most certainly," Theresa negligently remarked.

Beatrice stared at her mother in wide-eyed amazement Horror made her lips mute, but her heart cried out all the louder, "Starve! he? Is it possible? and while we were rolling in luxury!"

The fact which the baroness had confirmed as a matter of course seemed to the girl so monstrous that her mind almost refused to credit it.

The carriage turned into the Wingen court-yard and drew up before the terrace in front of the hall door. Lili von Tannen, with her elder sister, stood upon the threshold to welcome the new arrivals, and overwhelmed Beatrice with gay caresses as she took off her hat and light wrap, but Beatrice could not reply in kind to her friend's merry banter. The words "he might have starved" seemed burned into her very soul. And how coldly, how indifferently it had been spoken of by people who still added to his misery by accusing him of a crime which he perhaps—no, which he certainly never had committed. She was ashamed of her costly dress, the rustling of her silken skirt annoyed her, and when she was alone with her mother in the dressing-room to which her young friends conducted her, she hastily took the diamond stars from her hair, slipped off her bracelets, and concealed the diamond locket, which she would not take off because it contained her father's hair, among the folds of the tulle that she wore about her neck. Then she entered the drawing-room at her mother's side with downcast eyes and beating heart.

In the mean while Herr von Tannen, from the window of his own private sanctum, saw one carriage after another roll up to the door. He had carried Arning off to this retreat

of his immediately upon his arrival, and was discussing indifferent matters with him until finally he began: "My dear fellow, before our little festivity begins I must make a confession to you. Frau von Arning has yielded to the entreaties of her daughter, whom no human being can withstand, and has accepted my invitation."

A gleam of delight flashed across Otto's features. "To Beatrice's entreaties?" he repeated.

"Yes; the little witch reminded her mother that it would be impossible always to avoid meeting you, if you were resolved to re-enter society."

His usual expression of melancholy gravity settled again upon the baron's face.

"That was her reason, then," he said, in a low tone. "Well, the young lady is perfectly right to advise that what must be done be done quickly. And indeed I do not in the least dread this meeting, Tannen; I am prepared for it."

The repose of manner which characterized Otto's utterance of these sentiments was so different from the morbid irritability which he was wont to display at any mention of his relatives, that Tannen looked dubiously at him for a moment before he felt sufficiently reassured to exclaim, in a hopeful tone, "Are you in earnest, Otto? Oh, if you are! If I could only enjoy the delight of seeing my two dearest friends clasp hands in amity beneath my roof!"

Otto shook his head, with a sad smile. "You dream, Tannen," he replied. "There can be no amity between us. I know what words are on your lips," he went on, with a deprecatory gesture, "but do not utter them. You know me too well not to be aware that the old hatred, the old desire for revenge, no longer lives within me. I should not oppose a reconciliation. I have long felt how unhappy was the destiny that drove me to flee the woman who was my accuser. Frau von Arning could not but act as she did: if she was over-hasty, it was I

who provoked her to be so. My rancour towards her is long since dead, for I see in her not the cause of my unhappy fate, but its tool. Therefore a meeting with Frau von Arning has no terrors for me. But it is not so with her; she regards me as her child's murderer: that no mother can forgive."

Greatly touched, the vivacious little man shook his head at this unexpected declaration. "How changed you are, my dear Otto!" he said. "I need not tell you how this gentle judgment of your enemies raises you in my estimation; but, to speak frankly, I had not expected it of you."

"Because you took the utterances of a morbid state of mind for the expression of my genuine opinion," Otto replied, with a smile. "But no more of this: the day was to be devoted to pleasure. What carriage is that just driving up the avenue?"

"It is Frau von Arning's, and that scoundrel Warne is on the box! I had to invite him for the baroness's sake, but if the fellow had understood German—that is, polite German—he would have stayed where he was. Come, the Buchdorfers are the last," the old baron concluded, turning to Otto. "Why, I thought you were perfectly calm," he added, noticing his sudden pallor.

"I am calm," his friend assured him.

"Then come to the window, instead of remaining so in the background. Look at my little godchild Beatrice, and tell me if any mortal breathing could refuse a request from those lovely lips."

Otto obeyed, and without betraying the slightest emotion watched the ladies Von Arning descend from the coach. Tannen watched him in turn.

"You stand there as stiff and straight as my old yew-tree," he said, at last. "Verily, Otto, I admire you! Were I your age,—but I forget,—Beatrice is not after your taste; as a child you never thought her pretty. Come to the drawing-room, and let us have this meeting over as soon as possible."

When Frau von Arning entered the reception-room she scanned in a kind of dread the different groups of people collected there, but without discovering her cousin. She had never pictured Otto to herself other than she remembered him in the stormy interview she had had with him years before at Buchdorf, and was almost startled when a man of grave, dignified presence appeared beside Baron von Tannen, and in a few courteous words of greeting, without any reference whatever to the past, easily helped her to conquer her embarrassment. A weight fell from her heart, and for the first time in her life she felt grateful to her cousin.

The conversation was not prolonged, consisting as it did of the exchange of a few conventional phrases, and Beatrice took no part in it.

When Frau von Arning joined the hostess, Lindau thought it time to recall himself to the baron's remembrance, and to confirm an acquaintance which both his major and his mamma thought so desirable. He had been standing hitherto in a windowed recess with Warne, and when he approached Otto the steward accompanied him. They had been in a measure left to themselves, Lindau being as yet a stranger in a society where Warne could never be anything else, being admitted to it only upon sufferance.

When Emil, after a few words of self-introduction, held out his hand to Von Arning, Warne, with matchless insolence, did the same; but Otto so entirely ignored both the hand and its owner, while he talked frankly and courteously with Lindau, that there was no course possible for the steward but to withdraw.

This little scene aroused the young officer's curiosity, and with boyish want of tact he asked Von Arning what induced him to treat the steward with such contempt.

With less reserve than was his wont with strangers, Otto replied, haughtily, "I never give my hand to a scoundrel!

Pardon me, Herr von Lindau," he said, interrupting himself, "I trust he is not a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?" the officer said, with a laugh. "God forbid! What could suggest such an idea to you, Herr Baron? A miserable parvenu! His father was, I think, an old-clothes dealer in Königsberg. But I confess I am curious to know what disgraceful act the man has been guilty of. He seems to be accounted honest by the people about here."

"It is a long story, and I have no talent for narration," Otto replied. "But any old gossip in the country round can acquaint you with the follies and misfortunes of our family, and with the part that fellow has played in them."

The dinner was very much like other large dinners, quiet and rather formal during the first courses, pleasant and lively when the wine had circulated. At last the coffee was served, and the young people strayed about the front lawn, while their elders were engaged in conversation in the drawing-room. Tannen scarcely left Otto's side; he watched him as a father would a sensitive child. Of course the younger people could not but exchange many a whispered remark upon the unaccustomed guest, whom they had regarded as a kind of hermit.

Frau von Arning was also, and very naturally, the subject of much remark. Her long absence, and the guest whom she had brought to Buchdorf with her, furnished inexhaustible stuff for conversation. She was obliged to hear a certain amount of banter addressed to herself with regard to her probable son-in-law, which, however, she endured with great good humour, acknowledging frankly that the connection would not be disagreeable to her, but declaring that since the young people themselves were principally concerned in the matter she should not stir a finger to influence their desires. All that she said was so sensible and just that Otto, who could not refrain from observing his enemy narrowly, admitted to himself that he agreed with her. And now that he saw her with

the unprejudiced eyes of sixteen added years, Theresa looked handsomer to him than when Kurt von Arning had brought her to Buehdorf nineteen years before.

Tannen had just proposed a walk through the park when Fräulein von Arning entered. She looked a little pale, and admitted, in reply to her mother's anxious inquiries, that she had a headache. The baroness seemed much distressed. As soon as the least ailment attacked her child all else was forgotten, even the conventional formalities she usually estimated so highly. She would have gone immediately home, that Doctor Norden might be sent for. Beatrice had some trouble in persuading her to relinquish this intention.

"Do not send for Doctor Norden," she begged. "If I need a prescription for a slight headache, I am sure Herr von Arning will be kind enough——" And as she spoke she looked half shyly, half confidingly, towards Otto. "But," she added, hastily, not giving Otto time to express his readiness to be of service, "I really need nothing but half an hour's rest. If my dear godpapa will dispense with my society upon his walk and let me play invalid here for a little while, I will rival Lili in the dance this evening.

Fräulein von Tannen offered to stay with her friend, but this Beatrice would not hear of. She was, therefore, installed in a little morning-room adjoining the drawing-room. Lili arranged a deep arm-chair for her beside a table covered with books, carefully closed the windows, and, placing a fan and vinaigrette within reach, left her to rejoin her other guests.

As soon as Beatrice was left alone she took from the table a large book, almost too heavy for her little hands, and began to turn over the leaves. It contained, as she knew, the photographs of the baronial mansions of the surrounding country.

She turned page after page, looking for Ermsdal, and soon found the bare, rude tower. Then she tried to remember the

aspect of the interior, and searched for Buchdorf, that she might compare the two structures. How spacious and luxurious was her home in comparison with her cousin's dreary habitation! Thus she sat dreaming until the sun had nearly set, and steps approaching the door aroused her. She looked up. Otto stood upon the threshold. He had returned among the first from the walk, and, unacquainted with the topography of the house, had opened the door by mistake. Uttering a hurried excuse, he was about to withdraw, but Beatrice called him back. "Oh, pray come in, Herr von Arning. You ought to inquire after your patient. But indeed that is not the reason," she added, gravely, as Otto obeyed her invitation, "why I beg you to remain. I feel quite well again, and I long to thank you for Ami's recovery. I should have done it before," she went on, hesitating, "but mamma—you must not be angry, I really have never had an opportunity to tell mamma how I met you—she is not kindly disposed towards you, and so——"

There was an enchanting grace in this frank avowal. Otto bent over the hand which Beatrice extended to him, and pressed it to his lips. The crimson upon her cheek deepened, and she did not finish her sentence, but he replied,—

"I wish the baroness could but conquer her personal antipathy towards me as completely, Fräulein von Arning, as you have been able to overcome your dread of Brown Elsie, who can now boast a degree of confidence reposed in her by you which you apparently accord to none of your equals in birth."

He had never intended to touch upon this subject; but when he saw Beatrice thus in all her enchanting loveliness, and was at the same moment conscious that he had no right even to establish his claim to relationship with this girl, whom he loved with an intensity of which the foolish boy whom she was to marry could not form an idea, he was possessed by an

angry pain, which for the moment would have led him, if he could, to pain Beatrice in her turn.

"And pray what confidence have I reposed in that strange creature?" Beatrice asked, with unaffected surprise.

"Must I tell you? The fact of your betrothal to your mother's guest, Fräulein von Arning. You seem amazed, indignant; I hope I have not been the means of injuring the poor child in your eyes."

"I betrothed?" Beatrice cried, when she had sufficiently recovered from the shock Von Arning's words had caused her. "What a detestable invention of Elsbeth's! And to Herr von Lindau? I assure you, Herr von Arning, it is not and never can be true! Why do you smile?" she asked, imperiously.

"Forgive me. Your kind declaration, which I had not the least right to require, leaves no room for doubt. Only you must not be angry with poor Elsie, whose eyes were her informers in this matter, for daring to draw conclusions which chanced to accord perfectly with your mother's expressions."

Beatrice turned away. "I think you like to vex me," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I cannot convince you except by telling you the truth. Why should I conceal the fact if Herr von Lindau were more to me than a good friend?"

To Otto the fading sunlight seemed more brilliant than mid-day splendour, and the little room in his friend's house the entrance to Paradise. Not her words nor her tears, but the childlike sincerity of her manner convinced him of the truth of what she said.

He gently approached her, as she stood still turned from him. "Beatrice, I have offended you," he said, in a low, earnest tone. "Forgive me; my fancies are morbid and confused at times, and I say what I do not mean."

His glance fell upon the open book; it lay open at the picture of the dreary ruin where he had passed the saddest years of his life. Had she opened it thus? He could not

doubt it. And in the rush of emotion excited by this conviction, Otto might have been carried away to say and to declare what he would greatly have regretted afterwards, had not Lili with her merry train of friends entered by one door, and Warne presented himself at another, both full of anxious inquiries as to the health of the young baroness, and thus put a stop to any further conversation.

While this interview between the cousins had been taking place, the rest of the company had been strolling through the Wingen park. The steward had also been of this party; for no one knew how else to dispose of him. He had even been fortunate enough to secure a companion; Amanda von Hohenheim, a lady no longer young, had graciously consented to accept him as her escort. She had no cause to regret her condescension, for Warne possessed considerable conversational talent, and did his best to make himself agreeable, while he gratified his love of cunning and intrigue by keeping his ears open for whatever passed between those near whom he might be walking.

The pair were loitering in a grove on the borders of a mimic lake, when suddenly from the boughs of a tall linden which formed the centre of a group of trees came the loud clear note of a cuckoo. Warne started, and cast a glance of fury towards the quarter whence the sound proceeded. But Fräulein von Hohenheim, whose rôle was rather the sentimental, stood still and sighed. "Oh, heavens, how charming! A cuckoo at this late season! Really, Herr Warne, I feel the breath of spring play about me at the sound of that clear note."

"It is a rare phenomenon," Warne remarked, with great presence of mind trying to lead the way from the spot, "and is the forerunner of great good fortune to any lady who hears it." Amanda's sharp black eyes were still watching the thicket to find the "joyous bird of spring." "But that the

omen may not lose effect, it is necessary that the bird should remain concealed from the lady whose luck it is to hear its cry." This was successful. Fräulein von Hohenheim willingly followed where he led. "Does this strike you as superstition, Fräulein von Hohenheim? It is very generally believed in my home, and you know 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.'"

"But what good fortune does this note thus heard foretell?" Amanda asked, with an affectation of shy curiosity.

"Great happiness, Fräulein; so great——" But as Warne was going on to spin out a perfect Munchausen web of lies, the clear note was heard again.

Fräulein von Hohenheim did not look around, but Warne quickened his steps, and as soon as he had succeeded in rejoining another party and getting rid of his companion. he hurried back to the little lake.

He knew well what species of bird had been concealed in the thicket. Scarcely had he reached the tall linden when there was a rustling amid its branches, a dark form clambered from bough to bough, and with a last leap upon the ground, Brown Elsie, smiling maliciously, stood before the angry man.

"You go too far, Elsbeth," he said, with suppressed rage. "Your bold conduct is becoming insufferable. How dare you undertake to call me away from the rest?"

Elsbeth laughed aloud. "Away from that ramrod? Surely you might endure that without breaking your heart, Herr Steward."

"Insolent wench!"

"Compose yourself, my dear Herr Warne. I have been working hard for you, as you shall hear. You must forgive me my 'cuckoo,'" she added, with a sneer, "for it really is not my fault that no other sound makes any impression upon your dull ears."

The steward was full of impatience. "To business, Elsbeth!" he insisted, "and instantly! I cannot stay here."

"I will keep you no longer. Turn back to the house, and look into the fifth window on the left of the terrace. 'Twill give you a small surprise. Farewell, my incredulous Herr!" And, clapping her hands, with a burst of mocking laughter at Warne's stupefied expression, Elsbeth turned away and vanished along a narrow path on the edge of the pond.

Warne, when he had recovered his self-possession, followed the girl's directions. The spectacle that greeted his eyes through the low window was that of his young mistress seated in a lounging-chair by the table, and beside her, apparently engaged in a most interesting conversation, Otto von Arning.

Was any further confirmation necessary of what Elsbeth had told him upon his midnight visit to her grandmother's hut?

CHAPTER XIV.

SUPPER was announced, and Lindau insisted upon conducting Beatrice, who declared herself perfectly recovered, to table. Seated beside her he did his utmost to engage her attention, but without any great success, for the conversation became general, and its chief interest clustered, to the surprise of all, about Otto von Arning. He felt absolutely gay, and the unwonted sensation made him brilliant indeed. Witty anecdotes, sparkling jests, quick repartee, came bubbling from his lips as in his merriest student days. It was like nothing but some clear stream, that having been long choked up at last finds an outlet, and dashes from rock to rock, foaming and bright

in the sunshine. Even Frau von Arning could not but acknowledge the charm he thus threw around him.

Meanwhile, Lindau, greatly vexed that his finest speeches received but scant attention from his fair neighbour, sought his consolation in champagne; one bottle after another was emptied into his glass, and the young man became much heated, although not enough so to attract the observation of the other guests.

The watchful steward alone, whose keen though veiled glance nothing about him escaped, remarked the young man's condition, and upon it founded a fresh scheme for making each of his rivals a tool for the removal of the other from his path. Should it succeed, might he not by unwearying assiduity hope in time to win, not Beatrice alone, but Buchdorf, whose broad acres were in reality what he most coveted?

As soon as supper was over, and the young people were preparing for the dance, he proceeded to carry out his plot.

"It seems to me, Herr Baron, that you are very well pleased with our poor provincial society, although you are, of course, accustomed to a far more brilliant circle in the capital," he addressed Lindau in his smoothest tones, as he took his arm and led him out upon the dark, lonely terrace.

"Ah, yes; it is admirable, all admirable," Emil said, rather thickly, as he sank into a garden chair. "Fine old host, capital wine—eh, Herr Warne?"

The steward smiled, since the darkness could not betray him. From the young man's tone he saw that there was powder enough here ready for the flame which he wished to kindle.

"I really am sorry to interrupt your enjoyment unpleasantly," he began again, very calmly, "but I need advice and assistance, and I am about to confide implicitly in your prudence and judgment."

At any other time these words would have sounded like

ridicule even to a man as self-complacent as Lindau, but in the heated condition of his brain he took it all for gospel, and Warne fearlessly continued: "Of course the baroness must know nothing of the danger threatening her idolized daughter."

"Danger!" Lindau repeated, startled into attention. "Fräulein Beatrice in danger! Speak out, man! Let no time be lost."

"We are not losing time," the wily steward quietly went on. "The peril which I dread will not assail its victim to-day or to-morrow. Doubtless you observed that when we returned from our walk Herr von Arning was engaged in an earnest conversation with Fräulein Beatrice."

Emil drummed impatiently with his fingers upon the rustic table beside him.

"He is paying suit to her," Warne continued, "and I fear his suit is by no means a hopeless one——"

"Excuse me, but such an assumption appears to me entirely unwarrantable," Lindau here interrupted him, with irritation.

"Not to those who are conversant with all the circumstances," Warne went on, coolly. "The baroness, haughty as she is, has a dread of publicity with regard to former family dissensions, and of course I have done what I could to throw the veil of oblivion over the past. This very day I avoided alluding to it to yourself. But I see that you cannot rightly judge of affairs without a full knowledge of what has taken place, and therefore I beg you to listen patiently."

And he forthwith began a minute narrative of Otto's early career, and the crime of which he had been accused. From the time when he had so perjured himself years ago, he had perpetually endeavoured to convince himself of Otto's guilt, and his endeavours had not been entirely without success,

especially since he had, several years after the trial, made a certain discovery in the moorland hut. Thus he could speak with a degree of the warmth of conviction.

Emil listened with an interest which, to his honour be it said, sprang not so much from curiosity as from a desire to be of real use to Frau von Arning, and when Warne concluded his cunningly constructed tale with the words, "Herr von Arning has, as you see, grown wiser with years. Why should he commit murder when his end can be gained by so simple a means as matrimony?" the young man sprang from his seat, quite beside himself, and paced the terrace to and fro like a caged lion.

"The wretch! the villain!" he repeatedly exclaimed. "No, no! this must never be!"

"It will need both time and cunning to defeat so accomplished an antagonist," Warne said, slowly.

"Time and cunning!" Lindau replied, fiercely. "I have no time, and cunning I scorn! Shall I wait and dally until it is too late? No, the matter must be decided to-morrow."

"What do you propose?" the steward asked in apparent anxiety, although he understood perfectly well Lindau's half-involuntary gesture towards his left side, where he was accustomed to wear his sword. "I do not understand you, Herr Baron."

"Between men of honour there is but one way to settle such matters," Lindau said, haughtily, "and that way I shall take!" And he hurried into the house.

Warne rubbed his hands and whistled softly to himself. His puppets were obeying the wires excellently well. Arning, exquisitely sensitive to any allusion to his past, would be quick enough to accept a challenge. "Both are capital shots," Warne summed up matters; "both will feel deeply aggrieved; and I am much mistaken if one, at least, does not fall; it will make but little difference which, for the survivor can have no

possible chance with so decided and peculiar a character as Fräulein Beatrice."

Meanwhile, Frau von Arning was sitting comfortably at cards, and Beatrice was looking on at the dancers. Her anxious mother had requested her not to dance, and she complied all the more readily with this request since Otto had taken his place beside her, and was talking as in the old times, only that the old times had never been half so delightful. She looked up, therefore, with anything but an expression of pleasure when Lindau rudely interrupted the conversation with the brief sentence, "A word with you, Herr von Arning, if you please."

Otto turned and looked quietly for a moment into the pale face of the young officer.

"Has anything unpleasant occurred, Herr von Lindau?" he asked.

"No, but it may occur shortly," the young man answered, sternly.

"Then we will try to prevent it," said Otto; and excusing himself to Beatrice, he followed Emil into the adjoining apartment.

The portière closed behind the two men; they stood opposite each other in the small room lighted only by a single carcel lamp. With one hand resting upon the table, Baron Otto coolly and silently awaited the young man's explanation. Lindau, however, experienced a very strange sensation upon finding himself suddenly thus shut off from the brilliant assemblage and from all that had helped to agitate him. Otto's calm, self-possessed bearing had the effect of a cold bath upon his bewildered sense, and a doubt dawned upon his clouded brain as to whether he had any right to call to account a man whom both his major and his mamma considered one of their most distinguished acquaintances.

Yet such thoughts came and went like gleams of lightning

in his confused mind, and he said, with tolerable firmness, "I should like to know, Herr Baron, by what right you so persistently seek Fräulein von Arning's society."

Otto retreated a step, and measured the young man with a haughty look of menace, but, observing that Emil was evidently not his own master, he quietly replied, "It is a question that you have no right to ask; but, since our relationship is probably unknown to you, I gladly inform you that Fräulein von Arning is my distant cousin."

"You mistake, Herr Baron! I am perfectly acquainted with this connection. I know *all* your past!" cried Lindau, with flashing eyes, advancing a step, "and this very knowledge prompts my question."

"Pray come to the point, Herr von Lindau," said Otto, coolly. "You know my past—what then?"

"What then?" The baron's perfect calmness began to confuse Emil. He went on, almost with a stammer, "But—but do you not see that we must fight?"

"No," Otto curtly replied. "First sleep off the champagne you have taken, Herr von Lindau."

"Herr Baron!"

"I can take no notice of any challenge given by you in your present condition," Arning continued, composedly. "If to-morrow find you of the same mind, you know where I am to be found, and I shall be entirely at your service."

And turning on his heel, he left the young man to his own reflections, which were of a decidedly mixed character.

On the same evening Emil von Lindau gained fresh experience of the truth of the old saying, "Better not thrust your finger between bark and trunk, or between quarrelling relatives." Scarcely was he seated in the barouche on the homeward road, when Beatrice subjected him to such a fire of cross-examination as soon extracted from his reluctant lips his purpose in calling Otto from the room, and then both ladies

overwhelmed him with a storm of reproaches to which the reproof administered to him in the morning was but as a light summer zephyr. Frau von Arning, in short, required that he should withdraw his challenge, and became angry when he refused to do so.

She had so rejoiced to find in her dreaded relative instead of a revengeful misanthrope a quiet and as it seemed very unimpassioned man, content to accept matters as they were, who would be sure to listen to reason in case—and she could not silence a secret foreboding on this point—Kurt's second will should contain anything detrimental to his daughter's interests; and now this armistice which she had resolved to maintain at all hazards was irrevocably broken by her own *protégé*,—a guest beneath her roof.

She was so far carried away by her agitation that she not only uttered a eulogium upon Arning's good qualities, but, for the first time in her life, and in opposition perhaps to her settled conviction, declared that she began to have doubts as to the proofs of his guilt.

Beatrice, while her mother was speaking, leaned back in a corner of the coach. There was in her character, simple and childlike as it appeared, a strong dash of the ancient Arning force and determination in which her father had been so entirely deficient. Hitherto her life had afforded no occasion for the display of these qualities. But the feeling which so irresistibly attracted her to Baron Otto had aroused within her every faculty that had until now lain dormant. Whatever happened, upon one thing she was resolved: Otto should endure no further misfortune through her family. Thus she sat for a long while pondering upon some mode of extricating matters from their present unhappy complication, while her mother exhausted herself in denunciations of the cause of all the mischief.

The clouds were still dark on Theresa's brow when they

arrived at Buchdorf. The steward betook himself to his own apartment, and Frau von Arning bade good-night almost immediately and retired, leaving Beatrice and Emil alone in the drawing-room. The latter sank exhausted and depressed into an arm-chair, and Beatrice, standing gravely before him, began: "Herr von Lindau, tell me honestly whether it is not possible for you to withdraw this challenge, or is there any other means of preventing a duel between my cousin and your self? You know how much mamma would be gratified by a little compliance with her wishes on your part, and I entreat you to yield to her."

"But it cannot be! there is no way out of it!" Lindau exclaimed, springing up, half beside himself. "Fräulein von Arning, you torture me! You know as well as I that it is impossible."

In fact, Beatrice had expected no other reply. "I do not understand your code of honour," she said, with surprising calm, "and must therefore acquiesce. Whom have you selected for your second?"

"I had not thought of that," he admitted, with hesitation. "I know none of the gentlemen very well; but perhaps Herr von Tannen would consent. What do you think?"

Lindau stood still and cast an almost timid glance at the young girl, who had never before struck him as so grave and dignified.

Beatrice nodded an assent. "The choice is a good one," she declared. "And now let me bid you good-night, and hope you will sleep well to strengthen you for the coming day. God grant this affair no wretched conclusion; and forgive me if I do wrong," she added to herself, as she closed the door behind her, "for by fair means or foul this duel shall be prevented."

After a short season of reverie, Lindau also retired to his room to seek repose; but there he found a letter from his mother reminding him that his leave of absence had expired,

and that he must be in garrison again on Thursday evening. He must therefore, he reflected, leave Buchdorf by Wednesday noon at the latest, which would give him but one day to settle his quarrel with Baron von Arning. In great irritation of mind he undressed and went to bed, more from the force of habit than from any hope of sleeping. Contrary to his expectations, however, he soon sank into a profound slumber. and when he awoke tolerably late the next morning he felt refreshed and invigorated, in body and mind. His hasty conduct and its consequences no longer appeared in so dark a light as that in which the baroness's words of the previous evening had depicted them. In the flush of his youth and strength he could not believe that the next day would have a bloody ending either for himself or for another human being. He threw open his windows, and, arranging his delicate writing-materials, indited, without hesitation, a short note to Otto von Arning, in which he desired him to meet him on the following morning in a retired piece of meadow-land belonging to the Wingen estate. He sealed the envelope with his coronet and crest, and then rang the bell.

"Send a groom on horseback to Ermsdal as soon as possible with this note," he said to the servant who answered his summons.

Friedrich bowed and left the room to obey the order. But as he was going into the court-yard he met the young baroness, who had been on the watch for this moment since early morning.

She motioned to him to be silent, and led the old man, who had been sixty years in the service of the Arnings, up-stairs to her own room. Here she locked the door, and asked hurriedly, "Herr von Lindau has just given you a letter to send to my cousin Otto?"

"Yes, Fräulein Beatrice."

Beatrice held out her hand. "Give it to me."

"But——" the old servant ventured to remonstrate.

"Give it to me," his mistress repeated, quickly. "I know what I am doing, Friedrich, and take upon myself the entire responsibility. I will tell you what is the matter. I know you love my cousin Otto?"

The prudent old man did not instantly reply.

"Well, you need not answer," the girl said, with a smile. 'I know perfectly well that you are very fond of him,—much fonder than of me,—and would not for the world have any harm befall him. This letter is a challenge from Herr von Lindau, who wishes to fight him."

"Oh, dreadful, dreadful!" Friedrich exclaimed in horror. "Oh, I mistrusted the stranger baron from the first. It would be a godless act."

"Godless indeed," Beatrice rejoined; "and unfortunately I can think of no other means to prevent it except to withhold the letter. I will not open it: so have no conscientious scruples about the matter. And now I have another commission for you, and this you must execute yourself. Take the best horse in the stables, and ride to Wingen with a note which I shall write to Baron von Tannen."

"Then Herr von Tannen is concerned in the affair?" the old servant asked, turning Lindau's note irresolutely in his hands.

"Of course," the young baroness replied, already busy writing; "he is one of the principal persons concerned."

"Here is the young gentleman's note, Fräulein Beatrice."

The name of Tannen had prevailed. Friedrich was blindly devoted to the Arnings and all pertaining to them; he would have gone through fire and water for Otto or Beatrice, and also for Herr von Tannen, who had so loved Kurt.

Meanwhile, Beatrice wrote,—

"DEAR GODPAPA,—If you really love your godchild,

mount your horse as soon as you receive this, ride to Ermsdal, and stay there until nightfall. Do not look upon my request as a childish whim; life or death depends upon your granting it. When I see you I will explain all.

"Your loving godchild, B.

"P.S. Do not for the world let any one, and especially Herr von Arning, know that I have sent you to Ermsdal."

A few minutes afterwards Friedrich was upon his way to Wingen, and Beatrice, with a sigh of relief, locked up Emil's ominous note in her writing-desk. She had at least gained time.

When Lindau at the breakfast-table announced his departure as inevitably fixed for the following day at noon, both Beatrice and her mother were affected rather pleasurably than otherwise by the intelligence.

All day long the young baroness contrived to keep Emil constantly beside her. It was late in the afternoon when, in the absence of any reply from Ermsdal, his increasing anxiety led him to ride furiously to Wingen to consult with Herr von Tannen. But the old baron was of course not to be found there; he had not left any word upon riding out in the morning, save that he should not return until late in the evening. Lindau was not sufficiently intimate with the family to trespass so long upon their hospitality, and he returned in a state of great irritation to Buchdorf, where the next morning also brought him no communication from Ermsdal.

Now, although Lindau was excessively impatient at this unforeseen delay, the steward was far more so. He saw his carefully-laid scheme thus slowly coming to naught, but dared not by word or even look betray the rage that was consuming him.

At last the stately family coach stood waiting, and Lindau could delay no longer, for fear of missing the train. After

he was seated in the vehicle, and before the door could be closed, Beatrice leaned forward to him and whispered, "I owe you an explanation, Herr von Lindau. You need not wonder that your note to my cousin received no reply, for it never reached its destination. Here it is," she added, taking it from her pocket and holding it out towards him.

Lindau would have burst out with some impatient exclamation, but Beatrice imposed silence by a haughty wave of her hand, and went on hurriedly,—"If I have offended you I ask your forgiveness. But tell me yourself, was there any other choice left me? In a moment of anger you would recklessly have fanned to a flame again the old strife in our family, and when you were told that our future peace was at stake, and of what bitter suffering our poor cousin had undergone in the past, you mercilessly refused to take a single step towards a reconciliation. But I, Herr von Lindau, I love my—my family! Can you wonder that I used every weapon at my command to parry your assaults upon the harmony that seemed once more about to reign among us? Here come mamma and Herr Warne; not a syllable of all this, Herr von Lindau! And let us part friends. I give you my word that I will vindicate your honour to my cousin as zealously as I have defended his to you. He shall read your letter."

Here Frau von Arning approached the open door of the carriage with a few of those graceful conventional phrases which were always ready on her lips. What could the young man do but quietly resign himself to his fate, and respond to his hostess's kind words of farewell as gracefully as was possible to his wounded pride?

The door was closed, and the coachman whipped up his horses; one more wave from a white kerchief, and a turn in the avenue snatched from Lindau's gaze the girl who of all the goddesses at whose altars he had sacrificed had made the deepest impression upon his susceptible heart.

CHAPTER XV.

Days and weeks passed, and the autumn had fairly set in Theresa seemed thoughtful and depressed. Indeed, the rain beating against the window-panes, the wind howling across the moorland, and the yellowish-gray autumn light that filled halls and apartments in the old house were quite enough to impress with melancholy one who, like the baroness, found the summer skies of the North too colourless, and its July sun too cold. Besides, every hour brought nearer the eleventh of November, Beatrice's eighteenth birthday. This day had hitherto been the gayest of the year, but the opening of the old baron's mysterious second will cast a dark shade over the coming festival.

In many old families there exist certain rights and arrangements sanctioned partly by the primitive laws of the province and partly by tradition. Thus it was not so much the fear of pecuniary loss as a dim foreboding that her husband's last will might accord to Otto von Arning an undue power over Beatrice which filled the baroness with indescribable anxiety and like some ghostly vision haunted her couch each night, driving sleep from her weary eyes. Neither she nor Beatrice had seen Otto since the Tannen festivity, and in proportion as his demeanour on that occasion faded in Theresa's memory her confidence in his magnanimity decreased. It was touching to see the efforts that the poor woman made to conceal from her child the anguish of her mind; but no one except Warne perceived these efforts, and nothing could touch him, especially since at present he was himself anticipating the eleventh of November as anxiously as was his mistress. Did not his whole future depend upon the provisions of that second will?

At last the important day arrived, dull and autumnal, as suited the gloomy temper of Theresa's soul. Blasts of wind howled about the corners and in the long corridors of the old house, the weathercocks upon the roof creaked and whistled, now and then an unfastened shutter flapped noisily, and if by chance one of the heavy oaken doors was left open the strong draught slammed it to with a crash. In addition there was the monotonous drip from the roof of rain, which now and then fell in showers, and the thousand and one strange, inexplicable noises always to be heard in old houses, particularly in the autumn. Theresa could not remember having ever before celebrated her child's birthday in such gloomy weather; in her depressed state of mind it seemed to her an evil omen, and when after breakfast she led Beatrice to the table loaded as on every previous year with costly birthday-gifts, she could no longer contain herself, but threw her arms around the astonished girl and burst into tears. She soon recovered her self-control, however; there was still so much to be attended to. Baron von Tannen, as the dearest friend of the deceased, was to be present on this solemn occasion, and the aged notary, Ring, who had faithfully kept the will in his possession all these years, a service for which Theresa was not very grateful; and, worse than all, Otto was obliged to appear.

This "worse," however, existed only in the mind of Frau von Arning. Beatrice, it is true, had out of respect to her mother put on a black gown, but in her lovely face there was not the least sign of mourning, and least of all could the prospect of seeing Otto once more have depressed her. All the morning she was flying up and down stairs, from room to room, arranging everything for the reception of the guests, and it was fortunate that she had taste and judgment sufficient for her task, for Frau von Arning could be but of little use to-day. She sat in a state of dull despair at one of the drawing-room windows, torturing her poor brain with fruitless efforts to guess

at the contents of the will. "If the next few hours were but over!" she sighed to herself. "Certainty is the only thing that can give me repose." She even experienced a kind of feeling of repulsion for the husband who could so torment her long years after his death.

Beatrice had exchanged the small landscape above the lounge for Otto's portrait. "He really must not find everything here changed," she remarked by way of explanation to her mother, who however made no objection to her daughter's proceedings.

"Well, to-day your dear 'young master' is coming," Beatrice called out to old Friedrich, as she passed him in the hall. "Do not try to put on such a long face. I know how you adore him. Look, have I not put him in his old place? He used to sit here at breakfast, I think. I seem to remember it."

"Yes, yes; quite right, Fräulein Beatrice." The old servant looked around at the tasteful decoration of the apartment, and noticed Otto's portrait through the door of the next room. "But," he continued, hesitating, "but the Fräulein will remember the letter——"

"Oh, yes, it shall be duly delivered," Beatrice interrupted him, with a gay burst of laughter, "depend upon it, although its contents may not, perhaps, greatly delight your idol. Hark! there comes a carriage,—it is he!"

The last words sounded almost like a shout of joy, and the young girl hastened to be the first to welcome the Freiherr to the home to which he had been so long a stranger. Frau von Arning had also heard the baron arrive, but as at the same moment Beatrice's light footfall in the hall struck her ear, she sank back in her chair with a sense of relief.

"The child will know best what to say to this man," she thought.

Nevertheless, the greetings exchanged in the hall were not very lively. Beatrice could not possibly express what she felt

at this moment, and mere words of course would not come to her lips, while Otto was mute with emotion.

Beatrice led the way through a small antechamber. "Come and take some refreshment, Herr von Arning," she said; "you must need it after your long drive. Mamma and the rest will soon join us."

With a mute inclination Otto followed his charming guide. They passed through several rooms, in which he had the opportunity of leisurely observing the changes made by the mistress of the mansion. In one room, however, he paused with an exclamation of surprise; from the opposite wall there looked down upon him the life-size figure of his cousin, of the man who had been both father and brother to him, with the same cordial, kindly smile which he so well remembered in his childish days. The picture had been painted from a miniature after the baron's death, and hence Otto had never seen it before.

"Kurt!" he whispered, involuntarily, with a gentle sigh as he stood still before the portrait. "Yes, it is his dear, kind face, line for line."

And Beatrice thought she could detect the gleam of tears in his eyes. Her own brimmed over in part from shame, for she could not conceal from herself that her thoughts to-day had been far more occupied with the living cousin than with the dead father. As if to retrieve her fault, she said, "My dear, kind father! Indeed you do not know how he loved you, or you never could have been angry with him so long. Often, when I was alone with him, he would stand me upon the arm of the lounge to show me your picture and tell me how good and clever you were. I was very curious to know you," she added, with a little smile, which the tears glistening upon her lashes made more lovely still.

Otto turned from the picture to the charming vision at his side. "I hope," he said, with more earnestness than Beatrice had looked for from his composed bearing, "that my poor

Kurt's words were not quite fruitless to lessen at least the dislike of me which the baroness so diligently impressed upon your childish mind."

Beatrice looked down embarrassed for a moment, and then, finding no fitting reply to his words, silently went on towards the dining-room, where she turned to Otto and entered upon a widely different topic.

"I have a sin against you to confess for which I have no other excuse to offer save the miserable one that the end justifies the means."

Otto smiled. "Well," he asked, "of what terrible crime does your heart accuse you, since you seem to have selected me for your father confessor apparently that you may be sure of instant absolution?"

The young baroness gave him one hasty but significant glance. "I have no reason to suppose you so indulgent a judge," she murmured.

"For you, Beatrice——" The words came involuntarily to his lips; he paused. "Tell me, my child, what is it?" Something in his air, as he spoke, reminded Beatrice of the time when she used to hang upon Cousin Otto's arm unreservedly, or crouch silently for hours by his writing table, except that his voice had a more melodious tone in it at this moment than she could ever remember during her childhood; and so she took heart, and with trembling fingers drew the intercepted missive from her pocket. It was very provoking; she had felt so strong when justifying her act to Lindau, she had fairly seemed to herself to be playing a virtuous part, and now all her self-confidence had departed, and she felt actually like a convicted criminal.

"This letter," she began, stammering; "this letter, Herr von Arning, is addressed to you, and I—I intercepted it."

"To me?" Otto asked, in surprise, stretching out his hand for the note; but Beatrice still withheld it.

"No, no," she cried; "I persist in my wrong-doing. You cannot have the note until I have told you of its contents, and then, if you really grant me absolution, you will throw it into the fire. It is from Herr von Lindau. You remember the dinner at my godfather's, and that Herr von Lindau challenged you?"

"Did he tell you that?" Otto interrupted her in amazement. "A most extraordinary proceeding! When he called me away from you he was in so bewildered a state of mind that I did not believe he would remember the next day a word of what he was saying. He did recollect our conversation, then?"

"Yes, unfortunately, he did," sighed Beatrice; "and although he perceived that he had behaved in an excessively silly and unauthorized manner, he could not make up his mind to apologize. Nothing that either mamma or I could say had any effect, and when nothing else was left for me, I kept watch beneath his window, and waylaid the servant to whom he entrusted a note to you. I told Herr von Lindau all about it," she went on, eagerly; "not, to be sure, until just as he was leaving the house to catch the train, and I promised him to let you have the note. Here it is; but when you meet our hot-headed friend again, be merciful."

Otto bowed his head in assent, and broke the seal. The young baroness trembled as she saw his features resume their wonted sternness as he read.

"You are angry with me for keeping that stupid piece of paper from you," she said, with the air of a spoiled child dreading rebuke. "But what else could I do? Could I let you risk your life, all because of a foolish misunderstanding? I thought our family had already caused you enough unmerited pain, and——"

She paused, with a bright blush. What had she said to banish all sternness from Otto's face, and call up the sudden gleam of joy that shot from his dark eyes?

"Foes no longer, then," he said, with emotion. "Thanks, Beatrice, thanks." As he spoke he took her hand and pressed it to his lips, saying far more by tone and gesture than the words themselves expressed.

Beatrice was by no means pleased that her mother, with the other gentlemen, entered at this moment.

Otto turned to greet Theresa, to whom the imminence of the dreaded moment had restored a share of courage to meet it. Her words were measured and kindly, but to Otto's ear not half so eloquent as the shy, almost mute welcome he had received from the daughter.

The guests seated themselves at the table, but ate little and talked still less, and they very shortly betook themselves to the library, where the solemn ceremony of the opening of the will was to take place.

Notary Ring, standing by the large library table, first carefully wiped his spectacles, then cleared his throat, and producing the important document, handed it to all present, that each might be convinced of the genuineness of the signature and seal before he began, in a loud, clear voice, to read the contents, which ran as follows:

"It is said that the near approach of death lifts many a veil from mortal eyes, and I have in my own case proved the truth of this saying. With a mind freed from earthly prejudice, I have pondered upon my past life, and in my sorrow at its sad mistakes I would leave you, my dear ones, as my last bequest, not gold or lands, but the sacred injunction, 'Love one another.'

"I have been richly blest in life, since in my wife and the boy of my adoption, my young cousin, two noble natures were confided to my keeping. But, unfortunately, both were hasty and proud; neither would stoop to conciliate, neither would make allowance for the other's weaknesses, and I was forced

sorrowfully to admit to myself that my own character was not of sufficient force to harmonize these two antagonistic natures.

"I would not reproach you, I do not reproach you for the sad years I have spent. I myself made my life what it has been, when, in a moment of despair and weakness, I committed a great sin against the boy whom I had solemnly promised a dying father to protect. All that I could do to proclaim to the world my entire faith in my cousin's honour I have done. The will in which I named him the guardian of my child will have told you this; and it may be that when you listen to these my last earthly wishes, all rancour and hatred may have long passed away from your hearts. But should it be otherwise, I pray you do not turn deaf ears to my entreaty, and God soften your stubborn hearts. By the love which I bear you both, by the grief which the strife between you has caused me, and which has shortened my earthly days, I adjure you, lay aside all anger. Extend each to each the hand of forgiveness, and let peace and confidence, not hatred and suspicion, henceforth reign between you.

"It is not without a reason that I have appointed the eleventh of November, my daughter's eighteenth birthday, for the opening of this document. If you, my dearest Otto, are still unmarried, if there yet exists in your heart a single trace of the forbearing tenderness you once displayed towards the child Beatrice, if in her heart there still glows a spark of her childish affection for you, take her for your own, and let her be the peacemaker between her mother and yourself.

"It is not for the sake of earthly gain that I desire this alliance, which our ancestors would doubtless have arranged with the view of uniting the family estates; no, I venture to plead for it in the name of peace, good will, and family union. Yet, as I would not command, neither would I unduly in-

fluence you by my words. One thing only would I insist upon: learn to know each other! Do this, and I am sure you will be firm friends for all time, even although the close alliance which I desire never should take place between you.

"Should your union ensue, the question of property will be at rest forever. But should my wish upon this point, like so many other wishes dear to my heart, never be fulfilled, I desire that my three estates of Buchdorf, Grasort, and Harsbye be divided by those competent to do so into two equal portions; the one to be given to my wife and daughter, the other to my cousin Otto, to whom I thus fulfil the promise given to my dearest friend and relative, his father.

"I hope and believe that all parties concerned will freely accede to this disposal of my property, which is dictated not only by justice but by parental affection. Wealth, my dearest daughter, is as often a curse as a blessing. I can attest this from bitter experience. A wealthy heiress is but too often the prey of a needy adventurer.

"In any case, my dear Otto, I depend upon you to aid my wife in watching over my child's happiness, and to see to it that her choice in life is one that a loving father would approve.

"And, now that my last words to you are spoken, I bid you farewell, my dear ones, thanking you from my very soul for the kindness and forbearance you have always shown me. God reward your fidelity, and have mercy upon my soul.

"KURT HEINRICH, FREIHERR VON ARNING."

The notary ceased, and for the moment all present were deeply touched, nay, humiliated, by the noble, loving spirit breathing from the words just read. Good old Tannen hid his face in a huge red silk pocket-handkerchief and cried like a child; and even Theresa, although the provisions of the will

more than fulfilled her worst expectations, could not for the time cherish any thoughts save those of reverent affection for her dead husband. She had grown very pale, and sat with her hands tightly clasped in her lap, looking with eyes full of an expectant anxiety from one to another of her guests.

There was a pause, broken only by the ticking of the tall clock in the corner. No one ventured for a while to speak, a spell lay upon every heart, and as it was gradually dissolved, and the world of reality again made itself felt, the looks of all instinctively turned towards Otto von Arning, who stood with one elbow leaning upon the chimney-piece, his eyes bent on the ground, mute, lost in reflection. He might have been supposed perfectly calm, for the slight tremor of the upper lip gave no hint of the intensity of the struggle that was agitating him. At last he looked up. The silent inquiry upon the faces of the company required a decisive reply from him with whom solely the power of decision in this case rested. He knew this, but he wavered, and his glance sought the only one in the room who had not dared to look towards him, Beatrice.

She felt that the next moments would decide the destiny of her future life, and an eternity seemed to pass before Otto's full, deep voice broke the silence.

"I pray you pardon me," he said, "for my delay in replying; but, apart from the profound impression which Kurt's last wishes must of necessity produce, his will contains so much matter for reflection that I may well need to pause before giving a decided answer to its requests. Concerning the division of the estates, I acknowledge with gratitude my cousin's loving provision for the boy of his adoption; but I must at the same time emphatically decline once for all to accept my share of the bequest. It is not my intention to deprive Fräulein von Arning of any portion of her paternal inheritance, more especially as I already possess wealth more

than sufficient for the wants of my retired existence. As for the reconciliation with my relatives which Kurt so earnestly desires, I cordially offer them my hand in token that his wish is my own on this point. Indeed, I have so far anticipated his wish as to admit to myself years ago that the principal fault in the misunderstandings which have brought my life such unhappiness was my own."

Theresa arose, walked to where the Freiherr stood, and laid her hand in his, while in her troubled eyes there could plainly be seen the question now uttered by the notary.

"There is a third point touched upon in the will, Herr Baron," he said; "indeed, it appears to have been considered as the most important by the deceased: your union with Fräulein Beatrice——"

"You must perceive that I am powerless to decide there alone and of myself," Otto hastily interrupted him, and his voice quivered slightly. "But here also my cousin's wish coincides with my own: it depends solely upon Fräulein von Arning whether this desire is fulfilled." He approached the young girl. "Can you trust me, Beatrice?"

She looked up quickly; their glances met; his words sounded business-like, even cold, but there was nothing of these qualities in the eyes gazing with passionate entreaty into her own. With a deep blush the girl put her hand into the one held out to her, and uttered a low but distinct "yes."

She felt Otto's hand tremble, and the clasp with which he enclosed her delicate fingers in his own broad palm told her better than all words could have done that the calumniated misanthrope of Ermsdal was anything but indifferent to her reply.

The steward, who, by Frau von Arning's desire, was present, and who had listened hitherto in breathless eagerness, could not at this point suppress a slight exclamation; but fortunately for him this outbreak was unheard in the positive

shriek with which Theresa, arousing herself from what had seemed lethargy, hurried to her child's side.

"Beatrice, my child, do you know what you are doing? Your filial affection, your respect for your father's wishes, we must all admire, but you are carrying it much too far; beyond the point where repentance is possible. Herr von Arning," she interrupted herself, turning to Otto, "we are—we will be friends; I know that my husband has made the final decision in this matter dependent solely upon yourself and my child. I swear to you I will not force her inclinations, but I beseech you let me see her alone for a few moments, let me lay before her the consequences of the step she would thus take; I demand this of you as my sacred right."

With a suppressed sigh, Otto relinquished the hand that lay within his own, and retired to his former place beside the chimney-piece.

"Come, Beatrice," her mother continued, "the sooner this matter is settled the better for us all."

She put her arm about the girl's waist and led her into an adjoining apartment. Upon the threshold Beatrice turned, and meeting Otto's eyes, which were following her with yearning melancholy, she could not resist giving him a little reassuring smile.

The mother and daughter were absent nearly half an hour, during which time silence—but a silence that spoke—reigned in the room they had left. Then the door opened, and Theresa, pale and broken, led Beatrice up to the Freiherr and placed her hand once more in his. "Take my child, then, since it must be so," she said, in trembling tones, "and God grant you may make her happy!" She could say no more; the tears welled from her eyes. Was this a betrothal? It seemed to her more like devoting her darling to the grave.

The Freiherr was greatly moved by her distress. "Beatrice's happiness shall be the sole care of my future existence," he

said, kissing the baroness's hand, while the others hastened to present their congratulations.

Meanwhile, the sun had broken through the shrouding clouds. Every one felt inclined for the fresh air after the agitating experience of the last few hours, and the Buchdorf guests were soon wandering in couples through the leafless alleys of the park. Beatrice and Otto loitered along, arm-in-arm, gazing at the drifting clouds, at the bright sunshine shimmering in the raindrops on the grass, in "that new world which is the old," mute for the most part, since neither could utter the thoughts that rose within.

The steward watched them from a distance with rage in his heart. Of what use had been the labour of years, the crime with which he had stained his soul, since Otto had thus easily borne off the prize to which he had boldly lifted his eyes? He stood, an image of baffled rage, when a hand was laid upon his arm, and Brown Elsie's mocking face looked into his own.

"What would you give, Herr Steward, to separate the happy pair?" she said, with a laugh.

"My hope of heaven!" Warne exclaimed, forgetting all self-control, "if——"

"If it had not long since been sold to the devil," Elsbeth drily completed the sentence. "Your offer does not tempt me, but those two shall never be one, I swear by the heaven you have lost!"

And she vanished as quickly as she had appeared.

Her lifelong envy and hatred of Beatrice had lately been stimulated afresh. She had gone to the Kirmess at Ermsdal in the finery purchased with the money extorted from her grandmother, but the peasant girls had held themselves aloof from her, and none of the young fellows had condescended to ask her to dance, while the lord of the estate, the only person for whose notice she really cared, had negligently passed her by as if he really did not see her. Her vanity was excessively

wounded, and her passionate nature was stirred to anger and revenge. For he must have seen her, she argued to herself. Her lithe, slender figure in its fantastic costume, with masses of raven hair flowing free over her shoulders, and wild defiance in the large black eyes, formed too striking a contrast with the blue-eyed, flaxen-haired German girls to be overlooked.

Her sudden appearance before Warne had the good effect of impressing him with the necessity of self-control. He had just succeeded in restoring its wonted calm to his countenance when the baroness came slowly along the avenue towards the house. The gentlemen had taken their leave, and she was returning to her own apartment to seek there the repose she so much needed after the unnatural excitement of the morning.

When she thus unexpectedly encountered the man who had been for so many years her confidential adviser and man of business, she so far forgot her customary reserve as to say, "We have had a strange day, Herr Warne. One could hardly have foretold that Baron Otto would decline so wealthy a bequest and sue instead for my daughter's hand."

The steward was not quite master of himself, or he would have put a guard upon his lips, but his anger was at present so much in the ascendant that he said, with ill-concealed malice, "I never thought Herr von Arning a fool. Why should he rest content with half, when the whole could be had for the asking?"

The baroness, startled by both words and manner, gave him a long, searching look; much suddenly occurred to her,—among other things, that Warne had been for years Otto's enemy, and that this man's suggestions and testimony had long ago been the cause of Otto's arrest. "It shall not be my fault," she thought, "if our reconciliation is not a lasting one;" but aloud she only said,—

"I wish to speak with you on business, Herr Warne, and

this is scarcely a suitable place for the purpose. Pray follow me into the house." She stepped past him, and the steward, already repenting his hasty words, did his best upon the way to Theresa's boudoir to remove any unpleasant impression they might have produced. But the baroness was not lightly to be turned aside from her purpose. As soon as the door closed behind them she gave it words; the kind friend vanished, and in her stead a just but resolute mistress addressed the astonished steward.

"We have had no secrets from you, Herr Warne, and therefore you have had entire knowledge of the relations existing between Baron von Arning and our family. To-day you have also had an opportunity, as an eye-witness, of convincing yourself of the entire and complete change which these relations have undergone. I will not allude to the past, still less speak of my personal sensations. The Freiherr is to be my son-in-law; consequently, I owe him all consideration. But you, Herr Warne, are his enemy, and however great his fault or your—error may have been, you must admit that Buchdorf cannot be your home when it is his."

"That is to say, you remove me, madame," the steward agitatedly interrupted her; "remove me, a faithful, well-tried servant, for the sake of a man whom you yourself—enough, he is your future son-in-law."

This tone from Warne was something quite new, and Theresa was not inclined to bear it.

"You do not allow me to conclude, Herr Warne," she rejoined, frigidly. "Here is no question of removal; I simply propose to you to travel for a year,—at my expense, of course, for our contract is not yet at an end. I cannot see anything offensive in this proposal; on the contrary, I hoped in making it to anticipate your wishes, since to a man of any delicacy of feeling a life beneath the same roof with an enemy would be most painful. I shall be sorry if I

have erred in my estimate of you. How soon can you close your accounts?"

"In two days, madame," was the scarcely audible reply. Warne's voice was choked with rage.

"I will thank you to do so, then," Theresa said, and with a haughty bend of her head the steward was dismissed.

The ease with which she thus separated from a man who had been an inmate of her household for so many years, bore sufficient testimony to the fact that the steward, in spite of his officious servility and apparent integrity, had failed in winning the genuine esteem of his mistress. Theresa had defended him so long and so often against the attacks of her friends that she had at last quite believed that she liked him; but when the time came to part from him she was astonished to find how easy it was to do so.

* * * * * * *

It is night, and again the lonely lamp burns bright upon Heinrich Warne's office-table. With compressed lips and a gloomy brow he sits behind the piles of papers collected there. Although the autumn night is wonderfully mild, a bright fire is burning on the hearth and he tends it carefully; opposite him hangs the cuckoo-clock, but its busy pendulum has ceased, as has the steward's ill-gotten gain in the Von Arning family. On tables and chairs, and on the floor, stand two rows of books. In binding, lettering, and even in the more or less worn gilding of the backs, these two rows are exactly similar; not so their contents. For years Herr Warne has kept a double set of books, and he is now busy making last entries before consigning to the flames the set which has always been ready for the baroness's inspection. She has hardly ever even glanced at them; she will never know when another set is substituted for them showing the actual condition of her affairs, while the one hitherto shown her contains only dazzling falsehoods. For years the steward has been preparing for this moment; for

years he has reckoned every chance. His departure from Buchdorf finds him ready, although he has in the last few months allowed himself to dream of the fulfilment of fairer hopes.

When the first gray gleam of morning stole through the window-curtains his weary task was ended. In the drawers of the table bills and receipts were carefully tied up in bundles, and upon the table top were ranged the genuinely kept books, the false ones having been consumed to the last scrap, and their ashes collected in a small box. Heinrich Warne surveyed his work with a smile. There was not to be seen, he thought, a grain of dust that could betray him or cast the faintest suspicion upon his honesty. For all that might be discovered in those books the baroness alone was to blame.

He opened the window and looked out; as he did so he fancied he saw a shadow glide around the corner of the house. But in vain did he strain every sense. There was no one to be either seen or heard. The park lay silent and frosty in the glimmering dawn, and the hard soil beneath his window showed no trace of footsteps. The steward ascribed the fancied shadow to the state of his nerves excited by his sleepless night, and went easy and confident to order the carriage for his departure.

As he drove down the avenue wrapped in his warm travelling cloak, a cigar between his lips, he saw the little lake gleaming through the leafless trees. He leaned forward to look at it with a half-triumphant smile. "Farewell, lovely lake," he thought, "but not for long. I may soon return as your lord and master."

In fact he had grounds for such blissful visions; he knew that the baroness was deeply involved, while he had for years been accumulating in an English banking-house a sum now more than sufficient to extricate the family from embarrassment. He had meant to make Beatrice's hand the price for

such relief, and he had dared to hope that under the pressure of circumstances her mother would not deny his suit. Now that such hopes had been proved vain, he still believed that Buchdorf might yet be his. When, as was sure sooner or later to be the case, it fell beneath the auctioneer's hammer he would simply purchase it. The only thing that made him doubtful as to the success of this deep-laid scheme was his uncertainty as to Otto's conduct when his relative's ruin was made known to him; but here the steward did not anticipate much difficulty, since he took Aunt Bernhardine's view of the matter, and believed that Buchdorf was the real object of Otto's desires. If it should be lost to him he would surely find some means to break the tie that bound him to a comparatively penniless girl, Warne concluded, and he did not fear him as a rival in the purchase of Buchdorf. Baron von Arning had just made Repach his own, and he could hardly be master of a sum sufficient for the acquisition of another large estate.

The carriage stopped at the station. Warne procured a ticket for Hamburg, and the coachman saw him borne off in the train almost before his horses' heads were turned towards home.

But the steward did not go to Hamburg; he left the railway-carriage at the next little station, took his portmanteau and walked through the mingled rain and snow that poured without cessation from the leaden skies across the fields to the Repach forest. He was so fortunate as to reach the mansion belonging to the estate without encountering a human being. The building was empty. Otto had no use for it, and its former possessor had visited it only once during the hunting-season. Neither had taken any pains to obliterate the traces of decay which wind and weather with all-conquering time had left in the brick walls of the old-fashioned edifice.

The place looked melancholy and deserted. Grass was growing between the paving-stones of the court-yard. The gutter-

pipes on the roof had long ceased to do their duty; they hung down over the gable ends, or lay rusting beside the broken tiles. Some of the panes in the windows were gone, admitting sun and air to the rooms with their stiff, antique furniture. Warne rattled and shook one of the window-shutters on the ground-floor, and when the old bolt gave way he wrapped his handkerchief around his hand, dashed in one of the panes, and opened the window. It was the work of a minute; the next, window and shutter were closed after him, and he was stretched upon the faded sofa, trying to recover the sleep he had lost on the previous night.

On the evening of this day, as old Stina was sitting by the dim light of her tallow candle, making her spinning-wheel hum in rivalry of the black cat's purring, her friend Warne suddenly stood before her, as if sprung from the earth. In her first surprise the old woman would have called for help, but the steward, with a half smile, motioned her to be silent.

"Do not be frightened," he said; "it is I, Heinrich Warne, in the flesh. First give me something to eat, and I will tell you more."

"I thought you were off this morning. What brings you here?" the crone asked, as she hobbled to the cupboard.

"Did you think I would leave the show before the play is ended?" Warne replied, seating himself upon the only chair in the hut.

"Els said you had gone to Hamburg," the old woman muttered, setting bread and ham before her guest, "because it is near the sea."

"And why should I run away like a convicted school-boy?" Warne coolly interrupted her, spreading his white handkerchief upon his knees in default of a napkin. He was just as carefully and elegantly dressed as was his wont at Buchdorf. "No, I have taken up my abode in Repach, where I shall remain. I know all that will happen at Buchdorf. The

baroness has dismissed me, and I shall not rest until I have seen her leave also."

Warne had no concealments from Mother Stina, from whom he feared no treachery, since both he and she knew that he could at any time devote her to the gallows. She had been his bold and willing slave since the day when he had made a certain mysterious discovery in her hut. Nevertheless, what he had just said seemed seriously to disturb her. She stared at him and repeated, "Dismissed you?—then all is discovered!"

Warne took a hungry bite of the piece of black bread in his hand. "Not yet," he said. "That is our affair; I am here to tell you what we must do."

The old woman only wrung her hands; her courage was evidently leaving her with her physical strength.

"We are alone?" Warne continued, looking keenly around the dim room. "Your Elsbeth must know nothing of this."

The crone nodded, but her eye shyly glanced towards the bed-curtains, which stirred slightly.

"Listen, then; here are three letters; you must go to M—— to——"

"No, no!" old Stina protested, "leave me out of the game, Herr Warne. The proverb says, 'The pitcher that goes so often to the well gets broken at last,' and you ought to thank the devil that all is not yet discovered, and get out of the way while there is time!"

"Nonsense, Mother Stina!" the steward grumbled. "Since when have you been such a coward? How often must I tell you that we cannot be found out? But you never will understand. Let this money speak to you more distinctly. It is yours if you do my errand without more ado."

The crone snatched at the purse, weighed it in her hand, and began to count its contents. It was strange to see fear and avarice in her face striving for the mastery; avarice con-

quered at last. Mother Stina consented. A gratified expression flitted across the steward's features, but vanished instantly, as with his usual cool composure he put the purse into his pocket again, remarking significantly, "It is yours as soon as my errand is accomplished. Here are the letters. You will take a secret journey to M——, and as secretly contrive to have these three papers conveyed to the three usurers. Their contents you may know. I simply inform each of these people that Frau von Arning is negotiating loans with the others also; it will be enough to set the blood-hounds on the track; they will take care of the rest. Fortunately the loans have been so contrived that they may be called in at any moment. But go yourself, Mother Stina, for I would not trust your Elsbeth across the road, and take good care, for your own sake, that you are not recognized, for if anything should be discovered—it is well to be prepared for the worst—I shall admit that I negotiated the loans in the interest of the baroness through you, but I shall deny all knowledge of these letters. This you do upon your own responsibility. I tell you this, that you may perfectly understand what you are about. And now, good-night. I give you eight days in which to fulfil my commission."

With these words he took his hat and left the hut as noiselessly as he had come, while the strife in old Stina's soul between fear and avarice began after his departure to rage afresh.

In her youth she had chosen to pursue evil ways, and now in her old age, when she would fain have had rest, evil ways pursued her in turn. There was no help for it: the past is but the seed of the future.

As Warne slipped through the thicket, firmly convinced that no human being saw him, the clear note of the cuckoo sounded from a clump of trees close by. He started in alarm, but after one moment's reflection he found comfort rather than annoyance in the detested cry, "since if Elsbeth is wandering

abroad in the forest, she can know nothing of my interview with her grandmother," he said to himself, as he walked on much relieved.

Nevertheless, it was no draught of air that had stirred the blue check bed-curtains.

CHAPTER XVI.

No one testified such satisfaction in the unexpected turn that affairs had taken as Aunt Bernhardine. That usually cold and stern individual seemed quite beside herself upon learning from Otto of his betrothal.

"Now Buchdorf will be your own!" she exclaimed. "The wish, the aim of my life is fulfilled. Buchdorf will be yours, even if you must take that doll of a girl along with it."

Her expressions and views upon the subject were intensely grating to Otto; but instead of involving himself in useless discussions, or giving utterance to vain remonstrance, he spent his time when in the house at Ermsdal shut up in his own apartment.

Baron Kurt's last will, and the betrothal which had grown out of it, were soon matter of gossip in the surrounding country and the circles of the capital, where they were of course a nine days' wonder. Buchdorf was daily visited by numbers of congratulating acquaintances who came more from curiosity perhaps than because their sympathy was genuine. In this case, however, they left it without much satisfaction, for none of the parties chiefly concerned alluded to the betrothal with any degree of frankness, until at last even godpapa Tannen, who had heard the will read, grew rather confused upon the subject.

It certainly was an extraordinary engagement! It seemed,

indeed, to have been inaugurated not by the warm breath of life and love, but by the icy hand of death. Beatrice, for example, would stand for hours at her window, an opera-glass in her hand, continually watching the road from Ermsdal and the solitary horseman sure to appear there after a while. But as soon as he whom she so anxiously awaited had reached a certain point the opera-glass was laid aside, her dress subjected to a careful scrutiny before the mirror, and when Arning at last arrived he would find his betrothed busy with her embroidery or a book, of the contents of which indeed she could not possibly have given any account; but there she sat apparently cool and indifferent, seeming not to have expected him at all.

She often stood dreaming at the same window on clear winter nights, tracing out for herself a pathway to Ermsdal among the shining worlds above her. She knew nothing of astronomy, hardly the titles of the various constellations; but they grew familiar to her eyes, she called them by names of her own, and for her yearning fancy they bridged the distance between Buchdorf and the home of her betrothed. He never suspected this; she shyly hid these reveries from all the world, smiling herself at the childish dream which was, however, not destined to be vain.

Otto daily came to Buchdorf, but a spirit of inexplicable unrest soon drove him thence. If he chanced to find Beatrice alone he would talk kindly and calmly with her as with a dear child, upon subjects fitted, he thought, to interest her. If her mother was present he addressed himself to her, while his betrothed sat by mute and apparently indifferent. She had gradually convinced herself that her father's request alone could have influenced Arning to woo her, and this conviction made her shy and awkward with him. Once she had proudly boasted that she should never be ashamed to confess her affection, but nothing now would have induced her to allow her betrothed to know how dear he was to her. And Otto lay

beneath the spell of the same delusion. He saw in Beatrice the child whom he had loved nine years before. Obedience, filial affection, had induced her to promise him her hand without an idea of the solemn significance of the act: he would wait patiently in hopes that true love might in time be born of the half-unconscious preference for him which she had retained from her childish days, and, fearful of startling her by an expression of his passionate devotion, he controlled himself to a degree that certainly at times looked very like indifference.

Thus the lovers were playing a cruel game of hide-and-seek with each other. Out of tender consideration each for each they concealed their ardent affection, and it might be doubted whether, if some lucky chance did not dissolve the spell, the force of time and habit might not convert the semblance of indifference into reality.

Frau von Arning, however, was entirely won over by her future son-in-law; her mistrust of him had so vanished that the connection she had dreaded now seemed to her most suitable and desirable, and since whatever she did she always did with all her might, and never neglected conventional forms, she one day declared that since the infirmities of age confined Fräulein von Tretten to Ermsdal she held it her duty to pay her a visit.

No sooner said than done. On a cold day in December, Theresa with her daughter drove to Ermsdal. Beatrice dressed herself for this visit with the greatest care, and got into the carriage in a state of calm content. But as it neared its goal her heart began to beat loud and fast, and she scarcely heeded her mother's expressions of wonder and admiration as they drove over a well-kept road through what had formerly been a waste. The red roofs of the low-lying but extensive houses of the well-to-do peasant of North Germany were seen on all sides, but no sign of any mansion befitting the lord of the soil. The baroness opened the carriage window and asked the coach

man if Herr von Arning's dwelling was still far distant. In answer the man pointed to a low building in no way to be distinguished from the peasants' houses, except that it lay quite isolated from them. Beatrice felt her heart sink within her; all the surroundings here struck her, used as she had always been to elegance and luxury, as gloomy and depressing. She had, however, no time for such thoughts; the horses flew over the slightly frozen ground, and in less than a minute the carriage drew up before the narrow steps of the front door, where Otto stood waiting to receive them. Beatrice had not an instant to remark the absence of flower-beds, or the bald, cheerless exterior of the house; before she knew how it happened she found herself confronted with a tall, spare woman dressed in black, who rose stiffly from her arm-chair at the entrance of the visitors, and laid aside a large piece of terribly coarse knitting. She recognized the dreaded Aunt Bernhardine, of whom, among her childish memories, she retained anything but a pleasant remembrance. For Otto's sake she wished to please the old lady, and so, hastening to her, she kissed her bony hand, but when she looked up and met the piercing sunken eyes of the canoness fixed upon her, while the thin lips parted to utter a formal greeting, she felt like exclaiming, with Mary Stuart, "Oh God! from out those lineaments there speaks no heart!"

Confused and troubled, she sat down in the wooden chair offered her, and gazed in wonder at the meagre arrangement of the apartment, while the baroness and the canoness, who met for the first time since the marriage of the former, exchanged the formalities suitable to the occasion.

Otto marked her glance. "Our reception-room hardly meets your approval, Beatrice," he said, in jest. "What do you think of our Ermsdal hermitage, altogether?"

"It is very ugly," the young baroness gravely replied, looking up at him with naïve frankness.

Otto could not but smile. "I believe you are right," he replied. "But we will build another, as beautiful as you desire. You shall plan it all yourself, and we will come every day and watch the progress of the work. Shall you like that?"

The girl's face lit up with delight.

"That will be charming!" she cried. "If I am to arrange and select, the house will be the finest in all the country round! I remember some of those Italian villas—of course we could only imitate them in so far as would be comfortable in our Northern winters. But the new house must be nearer the forest than this, that we may have fine trees for the park."

"Do you intend building again, Otto?" the canoness frigidly inquired. "I had heard nothing of it! And in such hard times as the present! It is a pity that Fräulein von Arning does not approve of your home; but I must beg you to remember, my dear Fräulein, that Ermsdal was a desert when my nephew first came here to live, and its rents are still far from amounting to those of Buchdorf."

Beatrice blushed crimson. "Forgive me, I did not mean to presume," the poor girl stammered; "I think—nay, I am sure, that I could be very happy in this house."

Her mother was about to make a much less modest reply, but Otto spoke before she could begin.

"This house has served our purpose, Aunt Bernhardine," he said, with a frown; "that is, it has sufficed for the retired life we have led. It would not be at all suitable for a gay young bride. Besides, I have managed my property alone for so long, and I flatter myself with a fair degree of success, that I think you may safely leave its management entirely to me for the future."

An embarrassing silence followed these words. The canoness did not reply, but took up her knitting again, with a few words

of apology for doing so, and appeared absorbed in the click of her needles.

The whole scene was utterly distasteful to Frau von Arning, and to put an end to it she suddenly displayed an interest in what was going on in the court-yard, and expressed a desire to see it more closely. Otto of course accompanied her, and Theresa expected that Beatrice would follow them, but the poor child had set for herself the impossible task of winning Fräulein von Tretten's approval, and remained with the canoness.

Bernhardine said nothing, and Beatrice was in vain endeavouring to think of some subject of conversation. when the canoness arose and took out of the cupboard in the corner a huge bundle of woollen yarn which she made ready to wind. Beatrice timidly offered to hold the skeins.

A keen glance accompanied the reply to her offer. "Oh. indeed—have you no work, my dear?"

Beatrice stammered something about "a short visit," and "forgetting."

"Very well. Here is the yarn; there, now, the other hand; a little tighter, if you please. You must excuse me for not interrupting my work, but the mistress at Ermsdal has no time to waste. I rise at four, and go instantly to the dairy—A little tighter, my dear. Your present dress would hardly be suitable for my duties; not only because it would be too extravagant, but because it would consume so much time in putting on; for, from the dairy I go to the kitchen-garden, and then to the kitchen and cellar; the afternoon is for spinning and knitting. So the days pass. The best adornment of the mistress of a household should be neatness and order in her domain, and the money which her economy saves weekly. I have had a lifetime of experience, and know that these principles are the only ones worth having—But, my dear, you are letting the yarn slip off your hands."

Beatrice's arm felt paralyzed, and tears filled her eyes. Was this really the picture of her future life? Should she one day stand in the desolate room thus, in spotless cap and coarse woollen dress, her only joy the money accumulated by her economy?

She looked longingly towards the door. Where was her betrothed? She felt absolutely desolate and lonely here. And, as if her eyes had power to summon him, Otto made his appearance at the moment. The spectacle that met his gaze did not seem greatly to edify him. He frowned, and cast a glance towards the canoness that made Beatrice tremble. She had never seen him look thus before.

"What are you two doing here?" he asked, taking the yarn from Beatrice's hands without more ado, and hanging it on the back of a chair. "Aunt Bernhardine, I think it is time for some refreshment."

"It has been awaiting you for some moments," the canoness replied, going towards the door. "If the ladies will step into the next room"—And she led the way.

Otto drew Beatrice's arm within his own with a kind of passionate eagerness. "What has she been doing to you, my poor little girl?" he asked, far more tenderly than was his wont. "Do not deny it—I know your dear eyes too well not to see that you can but just restrain your tears. Tell me—what is it?"

Beatrice tried to smile. "Nothing bad," she replied. "Your aunt was only giving me a lesson in my duties as mistress of a house."

"I thought so. She might have spared herself the trouble."

His frown troubled the young baroness, and to soothe him she said by way of excuse, "It was kindness on her part."

Otto turned to her with admiration glowing in his eyes. "Never mind," he whispered, gently. "Her 'kindness' shall not trouble you again."

When the meal was ended, Frau von Arning, who felt very much out of place in this household, took her leave. Otto as well as the canoness accompanied the guests to their carriage, but poor Beatrice was not allowed to leave Ermsdal without another lesson from Fräulein von Tretten as a reward for her amiability. As they were getting into the carriage, one of the untiring knitting-needles fell from Aunt Bernhardine's hand upon the ground. The young girl instantly stooped, picked it up, and handed it to the old lady with a charming smile, receiving by way of thanks the harsh remark, that it was "sinful extravagance to trail such a costly dress in the dirt." True, a warning look from Otto stopped further observations of the kind, but Beatrice seated herself for the homeward drive much depressed in spirits, and wondering whether it would ever be possible for her to live happily with that old lady.

Otto gazed after the carriage as it rolled away, until Aunt Bernhardine's voice roused him from his dreams.

"A spoiled child," she said, shrugging her shoulders; "a little piece of affectation. However, she is young and shy; she may yet, with strict training, be of some use in the household."

Otto turned sternly upon the speaker. "I am glad you have spoken upon this point," he replied, "for it is best that we should clearly understand each other. And I wish you distinctly to comprehend that what I want is a wife, not a housekeeper. You call Beatrice a child,—a spoiled child: it may be so. Just what she is, in all her charming ingenuousness, I would have her always. She shall never work as I have had to do. As much as lies in mortal power I will do to protect her not only from the tempests of life, but also from its daily annoyances. Her presence shall be the peaceful harbour whither I can flee from the troubled waters of existence." He paused, wellnigh carried away by the picture he was conjuring up in his imagination. His aunt's half-astonished, half-contemptuous

expression reminded him that he was speaking a tongue of which Fräulein von Tretten was ignorant. He therefore concluded, with calm decision, "You will admit, Aunt Bernhardine, that since we have lived together I have never criticised your ways or your conduct. I demand the same consideration on your part for Beatrice. The scene of to-day must never be repeated. I will not have it."

The canoness at length found speech for the amazement excited by Otto's words and manner.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "you are becoming eloquent. I have not heard such a lengthy harangue from you for years. It is a fortunate thing that no one overheard you, or it really might have given rise to the report that the girl's moonlight eyes had turned your brain."

Arning shrugged his shoulders. "I am never troubled by reports about myself. I shall exact respect for my wife in word and deed from every one upon my estates, from the greatest to the least. You know that I mean what I say, Aunt Bernhardine; pray take my words to heart if there is to be peace between us."

The words sounded harsh and unfilial towards a woman who had filled a mother's place to the Freiherr ever since his birth. But we reap what we sow. If it be true that the man of noble mind honours as his true friend the one who, in the dark hour when evil passions sway him, ever pleads with him for the right, it is equally true that none can honour one who is but the echo of passion and who fans an evil thought to a flame. As soon as the hour of passion has passed, repentance brings with it a feeling of bitterness towards the tempter. Such an echo, such an adviser, Aunt Bernhardine had always been to her nephew. True, Otto, even when most carried away by passion and indignation, had instinctively recoiled from Fräulein von Tretten's advice and hinted desires, but unconsciously, and against his will, he had given way to her influence here

and there; he was daily more and more convinced of this, and that without this evil genius by his side his quarrel with Theresa would never have been so bitter. This conviction did not indeed lessen his own self-reproach, but it tended greatly to diminish his affection for the only human being who in all the phases of his unhappy life had been faithful to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE drive back to Buchdorf was not a cheerful one. It seemed almost as if in the hearts of the mother and daughter there was a foreboding of the misfortune which was so soon and so unexpectedly to assail them.

Arrived at home, Frau von Arning found upon her writing-table three dirty letters with ill-written addresses, the perusal of which excited first disgust, then surprise, and lastly utter dismay. Beatrice watched with anxiety her mother grow pale and paler as she read, and start up with an indignant exclamation when she had finished the last soiled sheet. The poor girl's troubled inquiry, however, received no reply. Theresa's courage had not yet failed her; the strong-willed woman did not want a confidant for her troubles, but help, and help she could not expect from Beatrice.

"Send for Herr Warne," she called out. "Oh, no, I forgot—he is no longer in Buchdorf. Then send for Herr von Tannen. Tell him I beg him to come to me instantly,—but stay, perhaps I had better go to him myself." And gathering up the letters, she sprang into the carriage, which had not yet driven from the door. "To Wingen, as quickly as you can!" she ordered the coachman, without even allowing the horses a rest.

Scarcely two hours afterwards the baroness presented herself before Herr von Tannen in his comfortable sanctum.

"Tell me, for God's sake, what has happened, madame?" the old baron said, terrified at her troubled aspect and agitated demeanour.

Instead of replying, Frau von Arning held out to him the letters she had received. Their contents were similar, and set forth the demands of Messrs. Aaron, Levi, and Katzenberg, three well-known money-lenders in M——, that the Baroness von Arning should immediately repay the sums borrowed of them at such and such dates under her own hand and seal, for which sums she had pledged her estate of Buchdorf. Each concluded with a remonstrance addressed to Frau von Arning for applying, without informing the writer, to two other money-lenders, when only the assurance that the property pledged was free from incumbrance would have procured her the large loan required. The aggregate of all these loans at their high rate of interest amounted to hundreds of thousands. A copy of the baroness's note of hand was appended to each letter, which concluded with a threat of resorting to legal measures if the payment in full were not made in the course of three weeks.

With a melancholy shake of the head, Tannen examined the mysterious papers.

"And you have not borrowed this money?" he asked.

"Not a single thaler, as heaven is my witness."

"Hm, hm! strange, very strange; the rascals seem quite sure of their case. Is it possible, madame, that you can have let any paper leave your hands which has been taken advantage of by these blood-suckers?"

"Never; never a note nor a signature, except——" A sudden flash of consciousness shot through Theresa's mind. "Yes, I have given Warne from time to time my signature to certain blank formulas which he assured me were leases,

etc. But I never will believe he could so misuse my confidence."

"He has misused it," Tannen replied, decidedly. "He and no other is the perpetrator of this monstrous fraud. I always told you to beware of him, and—— Well, that is past now, and cannot help matters. Send for him and call him to account."

"He left my house two weeks ago," the baroness dejectedly replied.

"Without leaving any address, of course. Proof sufficient. Let me pray you, my dear friend, not to agitate yourself thus. Take courage; the coming day will shed light on this affair. Have we not already found a clue? Nothing further can be done to-day, so have patience."

The old man expended all his eloquence, and finally induced Theresa to wait until the next day, and for the present to return quietly to Buchdorf.

Beatrice met her on the threshold, pale and agitated. Her mother reproached herself for having left her darling without a word of consolation. She now declared that her excitement was the consequence of a mistake of her own, and that Baron von Tannen was coming on the morrow to set matters straight. Beatrice retired to bed entirely soothed and content.

The next day Tannen rode over early, and spent the morning closeted with the baroness, going over the steward's books and accounts. The result was most disastrous, as Tannen had foreseen from the first. However certain Theresa might be of the steward's guilt, Warne was far too cunning a knave to have furnished her with any handle for legal proceedings against him, even had she known where he was to be found. His books were faultless; there was a kind of mockery in their exactitude, showing as it did with cynical frankness the yearly depreciation of the property. Some loans were not signed, but were explained thus: "5000 thalers

for interest;" and again, "3000 thalers for Frau von Arning's private expenses;" "2000 do.; 1600 sent to her in Switzerland."

Frau von Arning distinctly remembered receiving these last sums. According to the books her expenses far exceeded her income. If then she had actually used more money than her estates would yield, it must have been procured elsewhere; there could be no doubt of that. Warne had laid his plans well in thus contriving to make his mistress his accomplice, for who would believe that she knew nothing of these loans, or of the state of her own finances? Of course not one-half of the money had gone through her hands, as was clear from the fact that the steward had passed in a few years from poverty to a state of competency. But there was no possibility of founding any accusation of him upon this fact, for he asserted, and a legal document verified this assertion, that he had inherited from his father the money which he possessed.

With a deep-drawn sigh, Baron Tannen pushed aside the books and papers that had occupied him for eight long hours, and when Theresa asked anxiously, "Tannen, my best, my only friend, tell me, what must I, what can I do?" he replied, "Pay, dear madame, pay. God grant that cursed scoundrel his due reward! But there is nothing else for you to do. If the notes of those usurers are as correct as their copies and these books, there is no course to be taken except payment of the whole as soon as possible."

The baroness leaned heavily upon the table at which she stood. "And if I cannot pay?"

Tannen knew that she could not, and sat mute with downcast eyes.

"They say in their letters that I have pledged Buchdorf," the baroness continued slowly, and emphasizing each word "Then I must resign Buchdorf."

"Would to God I could give you other help than mere words!" the good old baron cried, springing up from his seat; "but my hands are tied. My property consists chiefly of the two estates which I made over to my sons last year, and I have not at my command any sum which even approximates the amount of your indebtedness. But do not lose courage. Nothing is lost as yet, dear madame. Let me advise you to consult Otto. He will feel honoured by your confidence, and, besides, he is the only human being who can help you in this emergency; he is rich, independent, understands men and things, and knows how to deal with them. Therefore, if you can only so far overcome your pride as to——"

"Never!" All the powerless but invincible pride of the woman's nature was evident in this one word.

Tannen shrugged his shoulders, and quietly determined himself to apprise Otto of the condition of affairs. He consoled the distressed baroness as much as lay in his power by hinting at the possibility of some legal error in the Jews' notes, or, if the worst came to the worst, of some composition of the debt. The kindly old man had been prepared for tears and passionate regrets, and the mute, stony resignation with which the baroness listened to his words of consolation without heeding their import, distressed and terrified him.

After a long while the beautiful woman's compressed lips parted to utter wearily the words, "What do you think of me, Tannen?"

The question cut the baron to the heart. "My dear friend."

"Tell me what you think of me," Theresa repeated passionately. "What do you think of a mother who watches over her child with such anxiety that she heaps suspicion upon an innocent man because he does not seem to accord that child the amount of affection the mother believes her entitled to, and who then with her own hand plunges her daughter into misery?"

"Not by her own fault," the baron ventured to interpose.

"By my own fault; that you know as well as I, Herr von Tannen. Why hesitate to say so? There lie the books where the whole fraud has been clearly shown with matchless arrogance for years. I needed only to examine them, and it was my duty to do so! But the wretch knew me—my frivolity, my weakness—only too well; he knew how far he might defy me, and repaid my blind confidence in his honesty in the coin which it merited."

Tannen could not reply to this passionate self-accusation on the part of the unhappy woman, who had sunk again into her former apathy. The early winter evening was rapidly approaching, and it was time for him to return to his home, lest his family should be anxious. Still, he did not wish to leave the baroness alone.

"Beatrice must know all this, madame," he said, decidedly. "I will send her to you. Promise me to tell the child the whole matter to-night."

The baroness made no reply, but her face expressed such pain and horror that Tannen saw clearly that she would not undertake the task proposed. He therefore took it upon himself to inform Beatrice of the sad turn affairs had taken. To his extreme surprise, she received with a degree of calm bordering on indifference the information which he gave her with great hesitation and reluctance. How should she understand what poverty meant? She knew of the misery which it brings only from books, where it was for the most part invested with a poetic interest rarely to be met with in real life. Only when Tannen spoke of her mother's despair did she seem distressed, and immediately she hurried to seek her out. But her appearance did not, as the baron had hoped, have the effect of soothing the wretched woman's woe. Of all people on earth her daughter was the one the sight of whom the baroness could at present the least endure. As

soon as she saw her she fled to her own apartment, where she locked her doors and refused to open them even at Beatrice's tearful entreaty. She did not hear the words of comfort uttered by her child; they were drowned by the loud accusing voice of conscience.

"It is not for myself," she thought with a shudder. "I knew poverty in my youth; its face is familiar to me. But Beatrice? She has been bred in a luxury which I am condemned to snatch from her. And Buchdorf sold! In Italy, surrounded by the wealth of nature and art, she was homesick for this spot. How can she endure to leave it, beggared, perhaps to see its beauty disfigured by rude hands? Will she be able to survive it?"

When Beatrice received no answer to her loving words she became alarmed. Had her mother fainted? or might she not in her despair do herself a mischief? Terrible fancies assailed the young girl's brain, and there was no means of procuring access to the unhappy woman. Beatrice looked around the elegant boudoir where she stood, and for the first time in her life felt really helpless and forsaken. She thought of Otto, and involuntarily her lips softly uttered the words, "If he were here he would know what to do." She did not know how he could help her, but in her perfect confidence in him she felt convinced that he could do so. She determined to send a messenger to him. In four hours he could be at Buchdorf. Four hours was, to be sure, a long time to wait; but "better late than never," she thought, as she hurried out to send a servant upon her errand.

Below in the court-yard men and maids were crowded together, gossiping; they already surmised something of the impending disaster. Detached words and phrases of their talk fell upon the girl's ear as she stood in the corridor, and seemed to her like the mad, disconnected sentences of the fantastic creations of a feverish dream.

"Old Friedrich was right, there is to be an end of all this fine living."

"Did you see Herr von Tannen ride off?"

"The old baron looked sad enough."

"We needn't be so, at all events, to have the stranger baroness, with her freaks and whims, sent off to where she came from."

"I think, for my part——"

"Nonsense! I tell you Master Otto will never let Buchdorf come to the hammer."

"Well, the Lord will see to it——"

"And high time he did! Buchdorf does not look like itself any more."

"Were you ever at Ermsdal?"

"Every day-labourer there has his cow."

"And a full hay-rick."

"Yes, it was always better under the Von Arnings; they were born here and belong to us."

"Things never go right when people care more for their park than for their fields."

"Or when they use their men for letter-carriers and grooms instead of sending them to plough."

Beatrice blushed. It was the first time that any of her youthful illusions had been dispelled, and it was a bitter experience. But instead of depressing her the lesson aroused her slumbering pride. She silently wrapped herself in a dark cloak, hid her heavy braids beneath a hood, and went down stairs. She could not send one of those men upon her errand. The hour for quitting work had struck; she would not impose upon them her "freaks and whims." But as, without a word, she passed through the court-yard, there was such dignity in her carriage and such resolve in her pale face, that the boldest of the servants respectfully withdrew.

The ground had been lightly frozen through the day, but

now the skies had become overcast, and a southern wind was driving before it masses of snow-clouds. Beatrice never heeded the signs of the weather; she hurried across the bare fields, through the leafless woods. She could fetch help sooner and more surely than could be done by either horse or wagon. Only a league lay between her and Ermsdal, if she could bring herself to cross the moor. And why should not the frozen ground bear her footsteps? Had she not traversed it as a child unharmed, although the soil was drenched with heavy rains? The undertaking was not half so dangerous as the peasants fancied; she had often watched the dreary waste from her window, whence it looked quite easy to cross.

When, however, she reached the edge of the forest and found herself alone amid the quiet wintry landscape, before the dreary waste on the horizon of which the moon was rising ghostly and pale amid torn and flying clouds, she shuddered and involuntarily paused. She was still firmly resolved, but no longer cheerfully self-confident; she clasped her hands and looked upwards to the clouded skies, as if invoking heaven's protection upon her perilous walk.

Suddenly she felt a light touch upon her shoulder, and a voice asked, "Shall I show you the way across, white dove?"

Turning, startled, Beatrice saw at her side Moorland Elsie, her arms and feet bare as upon the warmest day in July, while on her head she wore only a wreath of ivy, its dark berries drooping on either side of her swarthy brow.

Her terror speedily vanished; Elsbeth was the only creature who could be of service to her, and fortunately she seemed willing to help.

"I must go over to Ermsdal!" she said, with a sigh of relief; "and I will be more grateful to you than I can tell if you will guide me thither."

Brown Elsie looked down with a frown; she clenched her hand, and an evil smile hovered about her mouth. But Bea-

trice never observed these signs as her companion clasped her wrist and drew her along with her, saying, "Come, then."

Without another word she walked on so quickly that the young baroness could scarcely keep pace with her. And the ground, too, was much softer than she had thought to find it; whenever she did not follow exactly in Elsie's footprints, her foot would slip in above the ankle; she was obliged to concentrate all her attention upon where she was stepping, and had no time to address a word to her mute companion.

Nearly an hour was consumed in thus wearily wandering on the waste, and as yet no friendly twinkle of light indicated the situation of Ermsdal. The bell in a distant tower tolled the hour; its tone rang clear and sweet across the moorland; to Beatrice it came as a warning cry. Where could she be? The sound of the bell was unfamiliar to her ears; it did not come either from Ermsdal or from Buchdorf. What if the inexplicable creature by her side were wilfully leading her astray? Whither should she turn for help? Around her nothing was to be seen but the wide, swampy moor.

Again Beatrice looked to heaven, as if for aid, and, lo! it made answer to her prayer. The black clouds above her had scattered, the stars were shining with wintry splendour in the steadfast blue, and she knew that she had been deceived.

For upon the heavenly pathway leading from her chamber window to Ermsdal, every star was as familiar to her as the trees in the park where she had grown up, and now when she looked towards the skies the conviction fell with icy certainty upon her heart that she had been wilfully misled by her guide. Ermsdal lay far distant on the right, and they were rapidly approaching the most dangerous and dreaded portion of the moor, concerning which a thousand terrible legends were rife among the peasantry.

Beatrice stood still. "I will not go one step farther," she declared. "Elsbeth, you are leading me astray. This is not

the way to Ermsdal; the estate lies there, and we are going directly towards the 'Black Swamp.'"

The brown sprite gazed at her in surprise and confusion for one moment, and then laughed jeeringly. "If you know the moor so well, go yourself where you please!" And tossing from her Beatrice's hand, which she had still held in her own, Moorland Elsie turned and ran like a deer over the marshy soil.

"Elsbeth!" the young baroness called after her, in vain trying to follow her; at the first step she sank in water to her knee. She succeeded indeed in extricating herself without much trouble and in reaching her former position, a spot of firm ground about three feet in diameter, but what had she gained? The prospect of spending a long winter's night in wet clothing alone on a wild moor could be tempting to no one, least of all to a girl fostered in luxury. And how her poor mother would suffer in missing her! The child would have been more than woman not to do as she did in view of this fresh misfortune,—seek relief in a burst of tears.

* * * * * * *

About an hour before these occurrences, old Stina had returned from a long absence to the hut on the edge of the moor. Her back was bending under a load of fagots gathered in the forest; she leaned, groaning, upon her crutch-handled stick; it was easy to see that the crone's strength was wellnigh spent. But there was no one to assist her. Elsbeth was wandering somewhere in the forest, and her grandmother, if she would not die of cold, was forced to seek her daily fuel in the Repach woods.

The old woman paused beneath the stunted birch and coughed, and then wiped the tears from her eyes. True, Mother Stina was not the softest of her sex, but to-day a strange weakness had seized her, and she would have given much for the touch of a kindly hand. She had borne children,

many children; but where were they? Dead, or scattered through the world. There was none to take pity upon her age Was she cursed? Was it, as she herself had said, the just punishment of her sins? The woman sank on her knees; she could bear no further the weight of the burden on her back, and perhaps of some memory of her ill-spent life. She buried her face in her withered hands and groaned aloud. Suddenly she heard a low mew by her side, soft fur pressed against her hands, and looking up she saw the black cat, the faithful companion of so many of her weary hours. In summer or winter, rain or snow, this animal awaited its mistress at this hour beneath this stunted tree, and as it now crept close to her, purring loudly, it seemed longing to express some sympathy. Mother Stina turned to it with a caress; it was the only earthly being who looked to her for kindness and with kindness.

When Elsbeth came home, a bright fire was crackling upon the hearth, and the tallow candle cast a flickering light over the old woman, who lay upon the bed, breathing heavily in an uneasy sleep, while the cat wandered mewing about the room. He was the sole guardian of the lonely hut, which in truth needed no other,—for who would dream that old Stina possessed anything worth the stealing?

But Elsbeth's sharp eyes espied the key of the gaily-painted chest left for once sticking in the key-hole. Without even looking towards her grandmother, whose extreme weakness alone could have occasioned such neglect with regard to her cherished depository, the girl with one noiseless bound stood before the object of her life-long curiosity.

The key turned with a creak; the painted lid was lifted. Elsbeth took the candle, and began with breathless eagerness to investigate the contents of the chest. On top lay piles of rags, but beneath them was a small paste-board box,—how heavy it was!—this alone was worth the trouble of the search.

Elsbeth poised it on the palm of her little hand, when suddenly the old, worn sides gave way, and shining yellow coins rolled clinking and glittering hither and thither upon the mud floor of the hut.

The girl did not pause to collect the coin; she eagerly pursued her search, for a certain instinct told her that she had not yet discovered what she should most prize,—the goose that laid such golden eggs for old Stina.

What was this which she dragged forth from among the rags? With a cry of savage joy, she sprang to her feet. Ah! here was the solution of the riddle which had so puzzled her all these years. Here was the explanation of the strange tie between her grandmother and the reserved misanthropic master of Ermsdal! Warne, too, must have known of this secret, and by his knowledge had ruled the obstinate old woman with a rod of iron. In an instant all that Elsbeth had watched and waited and longed to understand lay clear before her. The characters and motives, the ends and aims of the various personages who filled the drama of her life were illuminated as by the light of the sun. True, what she had found would have possessed but small interest to the uninitiated; it consisted only of a white embroidered child's dress, yellow with age, and a little brown kid shoe, bound with a delicate golden chain at the end of which dangled a small sparkling cross; that was all. But to Elsie, who had forgotten nothing that she had ever known of the lives of those whose faces had been familiar to her from childhood, these articles were of indescribable significance. Triumphantly she held her treasure aloft, when suddenly her eyes fell upon the bed, and involuntarily she recoiled.

The old woman had propped herself up on her elbow, and her light-blue eyes stared at her grandchild with a look of such horror that even that bold girl felt her blood for an instant curdle in her veins. Rage, hate, and a nameless terror, every-

thing that the labouring breast in vain strove to give utterance to, lay in the gaze of those wide-open eyes.

"Els," she gasped at last, struggling for breath, "Els, shut up the money again. It is not mine. I am a poor, poor old woman, Els. Be a good child."

It was a sign of her excessive weakness, that she asked almost as a favour what she would once have demanded with blows.

"Don't be afraid," Elsbeth replied, picking up some of the gold and letting it slip through her fingers. "How they glitter! No one can see the drop of blood on each of the shining things! Don't be afraid—I don't want your money, granny. I have here a wishing-cap that will bring me what I like much better."

With an expression of despairing terror, old Stina gazed at her tormentor. "You must not suspect, Els," she moaned—"those rags are of no consequence—it is only—only a——"

"Only the feathers of the white dove which the weasel brought you to pluck," Elsbeth mockingly completed the sentence. "Do not deny it—you cannot. I shall soon prove their value. To-morrow I will go early to Ermsdal,—perhaps the Herr Baron will pay me some heed now," she interposed with a sneer,—"and when he has paid for my silence, I will go to Buchdorf and tell the pretty tale to his lovely bride——"

"Els, Els," shrieked her grandmother, despair in her voice, "would you have me die in a jail? Perhaps on the gallows? Elsbeth, my hair is white—I have always taken care of you—pity me, Els!"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "I must at least know all about the matter," she replied. "*You* had nothing to gain by the child's death,—who, then, employed you?"

"The aunt, Els," the crone hastily answered, "the aunt. I peddled a little then, and had sold laces to the canoness. Once as I was leaving her she touched my shoulder and said in a

whisper, 'To-night at seven.' Then she looked at me. I knew, I knew that I was wanted for no good."

A terrible fit of coughing interrupted her, but Elsbeth urged her to go on. The confession seemed indeed to afford Mother Stina a kind of relief, for as soon as she could she continued. "In the evening when I went to her we settled it all. She said she spoke for her nephew, who would not undertake it himself. At first I refused. You see, Els, children have a way of looking so innocently into your eyes. Many and many a time I have cursed my own brats, and yet I brought them all up. I said that to the canoness, but she promised me money enough to keep me from want all my life. Well, your mother had been lying ill for weeks, you were running about half naked, and winter was at hand. So I said yes, and went to Buchdorf. But I never harmed the child. Els," the hag hastily added; "I had not the heart. The man who wanted me to kill so pretty a little doll was a far more hardened sinner than I. As I was carrying the child in my arms over the moor the thought came to me, Leave it to chance. So I took off her dress, bound the little thing to the heather, and ran and ran until I was in safety. I never knew how it had all turned out until I came back to Ermsdal years afterwards. Our master gave me this house to live in; he never spoke to me of the reason why, nor I to him; he did not care to talk of it, nor did I. This is all, Els, all, so help me God! Have pity, Els, and let me die in peace."

"You shall, grandmother," Elsbeth replied. "All that I want is revenge. I will force the Herr Baron now to *see* me when he meets me. He shall never lead his white dove to church. I will not have it, and here are the means to hinder it!"

"Why do you want to hinder it, Els?" her grandmother weakly gasped. "What good will it do you to make the poor Fräulein unhappy? For she loves him, Els, I know it."

Moorland Elsie tossed her head, on which the wreath of ivy lay like a crown. "And why should she have everything for which it pleases her to stretch forth her hand?" she asked, wildly. "What better right has she than I, who never yet saw one of my desires fulfilled? Could she not content herself with that silly boy? I should never have disputed her possession of him. Who sent her to cross my path? I told you once before, grandmother, the master pleases me. And in the only teaching which the Herr Pastor condescends to give such a creature as I, I learn that it is evil to take his one lamb from the poor man. I shall guard mine well. True," she added, with a bitter curl of her lip, "I know only too surely that the haughty Herr Baron will never think of me as anything other than the beggar-girl whom accident forces him to keep upon his land; but *she* shall not have him; no, nor any other woman on this earth. I will be his evil spirit. And she shall not perish on the moor; she shall live to feel the sorrow which to-morrow will bring her."

After these words, in which she poured forth the gathered hate and bitterness of years, Brown Elsie hurriedly picked up the scattered money, thrust it back into the chest, clapped her hands, and ran out of the hut, while Mother Stina sank back utterly exhausted among her pillows.

Two hours had passed since Beatrice had been left alone on the moor, and her wretchedness was almost more than the poor girl could endure. She shivered in the cold night wind, her cheeks and eyes were swollen with tears, and in addition she was assailed by a host of terrors which would have had no existence by the light of day, but which might have beset even a strong man alone and helpless on that ghastly waste. Suddenly a figure appeared in the dim light of the clouded moon, it scarcely seemed to touch the ground, approaching rapidly and without the slightest hesitation to where Beatrice stood.

"'Tis Elsbeth or some sprite," Beatrice thought, pressing her cold hand to her beating heart. A few seconds more, and Brown Elsie stood beside her.

"I will truly be your guide now, white dove," she said; "not to Ermsdal, indeed, but back to Buchdorf."

Beatrice hesitated a moment. "What if you mislead me again?" she asked.

"Why, look up to your big map overhead, if you do not trust me; but you need have no fear. I will lead you to the third group of trees on the left of the pond in Buchdorf park. If I do not, set your dogs upon me to-morrow."

Beatrice with a sinking heart resolved to follow the strange being whom she believed to be not in her right mind. She feared some snare even up to the moment when Buchdorf lay plainly in sight and her foot touched dry ground. But her guide proved trustworthy this time. At the spot she had designated she dropped the young baroness's hand and turned to go. Beatrice began to stammer some words of thanks to propitiate the girl, but Elsie cut them short with "Spare me your thanks, white dove; to-morrow at this hour you will wish you lay deep in the moorland marsh; think then of Brown Elsie."

She vanished among the trees, while Beatrice hurried as fast as her feet could carry her along the familiar paths towards her home.

She reached the house without further peril, and found every one there in the wildest state of anxiety regarding her absence, of which her mother had become aware about half an hour previously. The torture Theresa had endured beggars description. But her terror had so far been of service that it had roused her from her apathy, into which care for Beatrice, whose failing forces brought her nigh to a fainting-fit, did not allow her to relapse.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUNT BERNHARDINE opened the window-shutters and put her gray head out into the morning mist, through which the round red ball of the sun was just visible. But it was not the sun that attracted her gaze; Moorland Elsie was crouching upon the door-step.

"Get up instantly and go away!" the canoness said, in an angry tone. "Do you think our threshold is a refuge for vagabonds? What do you want?"

"Certainly not your kind 'good-morning,'" was the insolent reply; "nor, indeed, yourself at all. I want the master."

"My nephew? Indeed! And what can you want of *him?*"

"Money, by your leave," Elsbeth said, boldly, slipping past the canoness, as she opened the door, into the house.

"Money!" repeated Fräulein von Tretten, amazed. "And what for, pray, if I may ask?"

"*You* may ask, but I would not advise the master to bethink himself what for for too long a time. I might refresh his memory in a way that would not particularly please him." As she spoke, Elsbeth twirled the golden cross between her fingers, and made as if she would ascend the stairs to Otto's study.

But Aunt Bernhardine's bony fingers encircled her wrist like a vice. "Stay, girl," she said under her breath in great agitation. "My nephew must never see that cross, never! Do you understand me? I do not know how it came into your possession. I thought it was destroyed long ago. But come, come with me. I will give you money. How much do you want? Come with me."

As she spoke, she drew Elsie into the sitting-room, and opened a drawer in which notes and silver coin were arranged in perfect order. "How much do you want?" the canoness hurriedly demanded.

Elsie saw clearly that her attempt to humiliate Baron von Arning must be given up for to-day. Her anger at finding her hope thus destroyed was lost in her surprise at this unexpected discovery. What, the master must not see the cross! Then he really knew nothing of the crime that had been committed in his name! Such a possibility had never occurred to either Elsbeth or old Stina.

Hard as was Brown Elsie's heart, it could not but be stirred oy a momentary pity for the man so deceived by his nearest relative. This better feeling, however, vanished like the light of the will-o'-the-wisp, and she replied, insolently, "That kind of money will do me no good—silver is too heavy and paper too light; if you really wish to pay instead of the master, let it be in shining gold pieces, about—how many shall we say? One would slip through the hole in my pocket, and one hundred would tear the pocket out entirely. Well, give me a good round dozen then, and I will not trouble you again this year."

Aunt Bernhardine stiffened with dismay; she had hoped to buy off the beggar-girl with a few thalers, and only on that account had so readily acceded to her demand for money.

"You insolent gipsy wench!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Do you suppose you can rob me thus with impunity? Another word and I will have you sent off from Ermsdal——"

"Buchdorf will gladly receive us," Elsbeth interrupted her, negligently, as she held up the fatal articles of dress before the eyes of the amazed canoness.

Fräulein von Tretten's anger, so far as any outward manifestation of it was concerned, was appeased immediately by Elsbeth's last words as if by a spell. It was, however, all the

more intense thus suppressed, and if she had been a younger woman there is no saying what means she might have resorted to to rid herself of so dangerous an accomplice. She saw clearly that not a whisper of what the girl had to tell must be breathed at Buchdorf. She would try to outwit her adversary by apparent compliance.

"I cannot immediately give you quite as much as you ask," she said, with forced composure. "Only a few weeks ago I paid your grandmother the twenty-four pieces of gold which, according to our bargain, were to suffice for a year. It is treachery on her part to send you to me now with such a demand. Nevertheless, I would pay you if I could. Be reasonable, Elsbeth. I will give you three more gold pieces if you will wait three months. Look, everything that I possess is in this drawer, and my nephew must never know——"

Strong as Aunt Bernhardine's nerves were, she here interrupted herself by what was almost a shriek. Otto was standing in the door-way, his gun over his shoulder, in full hunting-dress, apparently just about to leave the house. He must have heard the last of the conversation. With a frown he approached the terrified pair. "What do you owe old Stina, aunt, that you cannot pay, and of which I must know nothing? And what are these?" he added, picking up the articles which Elsbeth, in her confusion at his sudden appearance, had let fall upon the table.

Elsbeth could read men's faces; she had looked on with indifference at many an outbreak of frantic despair, but the change that passed over Otto's countenance as soon as he had glanced at the objects in his hand filled her with horror. The strong man grew whiter than the wall, and a shiver convulsed him as he leaned for support upon the massive table. He bent a stern, searching look upon the canoness, who stood by the open drawer the picture of detected guilt. A short pause of death-like silence ensued; there are no words for

what, during that space of time, passed in the minds of the two people who had for many years dwelt peacefully beneath the same roof.

"I wanted to—sell those old things to the lady," Elsbeth stammered at last. It was the first kindly lie she had ever told; in truth, spite of all her insolence, she now wished she had never come.

The Freiherr's only reply was a contemptuous wave of his hand.

"And you have been paying old Stina for this cross for fifteen years!" he said, turning to the canoness, with an icy calm in words and manner far more annihilating than the most violent outbreak could have been. "Was it because of this cross that you persuaded me to give the old vagabond shelter and protection upon my estate? Was it because of this cross that you, usually so intolerant, bore with all her strange conduct? All for the sake of this cross?"

Fräulein von Tretten sought in vain for words in which to reply; but words were unnecessary; in one dreadful moment the whole fatal combination of circumstances had flashed upon Otto's mind. He knew now that his aunt would fain have committed murder, and for him. With the refined delicacy of sensitively endowed natures which partly assume the responsibility of what has been done for their sakes, he felt his soul burdened with a share of guilt, and, with suffering as keen as it was powerless, saw an insurmountable barrier thus interposed between Beatrice and himself.

"And you would have allowed a pure innocent girl to bestow her hand upon a murderer—her murderer?" he continued, inexorably.

"Otto!" the canoness almost shrieked. The Freiherr turned from her with contempt.

"No need to wring your hands thus, fiend in human shape that you now seem to me. If your heart were susceptible of

pity you would have felt it for a child but three years old! But you have nothing to fear. We are chained together more closely than galley-slaves. Your honour is mine,—of course I shall pay. Come here, Elsbeth." He opened his desk. "How much will buy your silence?"

Piles of gold glittered in the compartments of the drawers, the entire profits of the year's harvest, but for the moment the sight was powerless to arouse the girl's cupidity.

"Twelve pieces of gold, I thought," she stammered, almost timidly; "but there is no hurry. If——"

Otto interrupted her. "Twelve pieces for the present," he said, dully. "What price do you ask for perpetual silence? My engagement is of course at an end, but my betrothed must never learn wherefore. So ask a good round sum for these proofs, which must be given up to me, and let the matter be at rest forever. How much do you want?"

"I do not know," Elsbeth, who was growing more and more uncomfortable with every minute, answered, in a low tone.

Otto put his hand into a drawer and took thence a handful of notes and gold without heeding their amount. "Here, Elsbeth," he said, "look here; is this enough? or do you want more? Ask for all Ermsdal, if you will! Be quick! Is it enough? or—here is more. I *must* be left in peace."

"This is enough," Brown Elsie said, in a tremor, covering the heap of money with one hand, while with the other she pushed from her the second handful which Otto held out to her. She could not endure any longer to look into his deathly pale face, or to listen to the words which nothing but an agony that was almost madness could have wrung from so proud and reserved a man as the lord of Ermsdal. Her end was gained, however,—his engagement to Beatrice was broken. She prepared instantly to leave the spot where for the first time in her life she had experienced a species of shuddering respect for the better qualities of human nature.

"Is that enough, then?" Otto repeated, in the same calm, business-like tone. "Enough for to-day and for always? You will never betray the secret, and never make any further demand upon me?'

"Never," Elsbeth said, emphatically.

The Freiherr pointed to the door, through which Elsbeth's lithe, slender figure instantly made its escape, and the two people whose intercourse had just reached so overwhelming a crisis were left alone together.

A long silence ensued. Arning gazed fixedly into space, and seemed entirely to have forgotten the presence of the canoness.

"Otto," she ventured at last to break the oppressive silence.

No answer.

"Otto," she began again, after a while, "do not stand there so stern and cold, as if I were not worthy of a glance. I cannot bear it! Whatever I may have done, I did for your sake. Your incessant complaints and petulance drove me to it. And if I transgressed both human and divine laws, you at least have no right to reproach me."

Otto turned wearily towards her. "Aunt," he said, slowly, "you acted upon a menace uttered by an angry boy in a moment of insane agitation,—a menace which, I take God to witness, would never else have had any result! That, however, does not alter the fact. I am the intellectual perpetrator of this crime, and the responsibility of the indescribable misery that it caused is mine as well as yours. I therefore do not reproach you on account of my cousin's untimely death, Beatrice's wretched childhood, and my own forlorn existence,—all this you must settle with your own conscience; but you cannot but see that this hour has separated us forever."

"That means," the canoness cried out, in wild distress, "that in return for all my affection, you will turn me adrift in my old age to poverty and misery?"

"No," Otto calmly replied; "you shall live in luxury wherever you choose,—in Ermsdal if you will; but in that case I shall put the ocean between us."

"Otto, Otto!" she cried, wringing her hands, "you cannot mean that! it would be too hard!"

Affection for her nephew seemed to be the only kindly emotion of her heart. Otto, however, was unmoved by the sight of her grief. "The sight of you is painful to me," he said, harshly, "and I must have peace, if I would live."

The thought of Beatrice, and of the happiness he had dared to hope might be his, suddenly so overcame him that he sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Aunt Bernhardine gathered fresh courage from this first sign of human emotion.

"I will not go," she protested. "Neither entreaty nor menace shall drive me from you, Otto. Who will care for you if you send away the only living creature that has always been true to you? No, I will stay with you,—there is nothing else to be done. And if you cross the sea, Otto, I will go wherever you go, in spite of my age and infirmity."

Otto arose, with stern determination in his look, as he coldly replied, "Thank God, there is one place whither you cannot follow me. And be sure I will find some way to rid myself of your presence."

With these words he left the room, and the canoness heard him ascend the stairs, enter his own apartment, and bolt himself in.

She leaned trembling upon the table for support. All the strength that was in her seemed to forsake her aged frame at Otto's final words. Was her mortal career to end thus wretchedly? The only human being for whom she entertained any affection, he for whom she had slaved, and saved, and sinned, turned from her with loathing; no friendly hand would ever close her dying eyes. What was she living for?

She tried not to believe what she knew but too well. She sent a servant to Otto to beg him to see her once more. Her messenger returned to her in a few moments, bringing her a sealed envelope. Was it an answer? The canoness hastily tore it open; it was filled with bank-notes; there was in it not a line nor a word from him. She would have wept and cried, but her voice failed her. She would have gone up to Otto's door, but her trembling knees refused her their support. In as few words as possible she directed her astonished maid to pack up her few belongings in her trunks, and stood by while it was done, gazing round with a dull, vacant expression upon the walls she had seen built and of which she was now taking so sad an eternal farewell.

* * * * * * *

Beatrice, meanwhile, entirely recovered from her fright, greeted the dawning of the next day with delight. It would bring Otto, and then all would be well. But hour after hour passed on leaden wings, and he whom she so longed for did not come.

Over the lordly old mansion brooded the shadow of coming misfortune. The servants moved noiselessly about the halls and the long corridors. Low whisperings were heard among them, quickly silenced at the approach of one of their mistresses. Any negligence passed unreproved by the baroness. No one spoke a loud word; it was as if there had just been a death in the house.

At last, towards noon, a letter arrived from Ermsdal. Beatrice opened it hurriedly—what could have prevented Otto from coming himself? As she read, the blood rushed to her cheek, only to retreat the next moment and give place to a death-like pallor. She could not control her voice to speak, but silently handed the note to her mother.

It was, in truth, a most extraordinary letter. There was no sign in its clear characters of the tremor convulsing the

writer's frame as he penned it; no hint in its calm sentences of the torture racking the brain that had produced them. Otto briefly and decisively announced that he found himself compelled to resign all pretensions to the hand of the young baroness, for reasons which he begged to be spared from stating. This was all; there was no word of explanation, regret, or excuse. Frau von Arning sat for one minute speechless at this unexpected blow, and then all her old hatred of Otto, suddenly called back to life, found vent in a stream of angry eloquence. Her estimate of his character had been correct, then. Otto von Arning was only an unprincipled schemer, with whom no means that might aid in the attainment of his avaricious aims were either too base or too sacred. Murder and matrimony were alike in his eyes if by either he might become master of Buchdorf. His end could now be attained far more easily than by marriage with a portionless girl. Of course so disadvantageous a connection must be instantly dissolved.

Beatrice had spoken no word since first opening her letter. Her mother's angry outbreak was met on her part only by a look of terrified surprise in her large eyes. She turned away silently and went to her own room. The window was open; she went to it mechanically and gazed up into the masses of snow-clouds that veiled the heavens. An icy breeze whistled through the bare boughs of the lindens, and toyed with the curls upon her forehead; she did not feel it. Her heart seemed dead to pain, anger, or reproach.

She herself wondered at her perfect calm and her entire capacity for lucid reflection. Some chord within her heart seemed to have snapped asunder, never again to vibrate with either joy or sorrow.

Thus she stood, immovable, indifferent, for hours. She had lost the measure of time, for what could the future bring her or take from her? Mechanically she raised her hand to her forehead as if it pained her.

"I wish I had perished on the moor yesterday," she said, in a whisper, and then she shuddered. Those were Elsbeth's very words. Did that incomprehensible being know that Otto was about to resign her? Did she know anything of his motives? Beatrice in vain attempted to divine them. Had Aunt Bernhardine's influence effected this separation, or did Otto love another? The change in her circumstances also occurred to her; but she banished the thought instantly. It was impossible that he could have broken with her for such a cause.

"I see, I see," she said to herself, "that so insignificant a girl as I could never really gain his love; but why, oh, why did he play so cruel a game with my heart?"

Her face burned as she thought of her attempt to go to Ermsdal the day before. What if she had succeeded in reaching the house of the man whose heart was already cold towards her? To-day she was grateful to the brown elf who had prevented the execution of her scheme.

Towards evening Beatrice saw Herr von Tannen drive up the avenue, and a gleam of joy irradiated her pale features. He was her mother's friend and Otto's; his judgment would, unlike her mother's, be just and impartial.

"I will trust what he says," she thought, as she slowly descended the stairs to the library.

The kindly old man had learned already of the rupture of the engagement, and was much agitated by the intelligence. He had been to Ermsdal in the morning to apprise Otto of the state of affairs at Buchdorf; but for the first time in his life Otto had refused to see him. Aunt Bernhardine, however, pale as death, and with every sign of agitation, had rushed past him in the hall. She was in bonnet and shawl, and followed by a stout maid-servant laden with boxes and packages.

"He is mad!" she had called out to the baron, wringing her hands. "He has gone stark mad! Broken with his

betrothed, with me, with you, repulsing all who care for him! Oh, how will it all end?"

Herr von Tannen was deeply hurt by Otto's refusal to see him, and in his agitation he forgot all his usual kindliness, and could not refrain from agreeing with the baroness that Otto could have been led to close his door upon his oldest and most faithful friend only from a feeling of shame for his dishonourable treatment of his betrothed in her changed circumstances. For the first time the old baron and Theresa agreed in their estimate of Otto's conduct.

The day had brought another unpleasant surprise to Theresa. Simultaneously with Otto's letter to Beatrice, Frau von Arning had received the announcement of Herr von Lindau's betrothal.

Beatrice's interference in his quarrel with Baron von Arning, and her interception of his letter, had wounded the young man's pride excessively, and had deprived the "sun of his existence" of all power of attraction. Arrived in the capital, he soon became part of another solar system,—that is, he gave his fiery heart into the keeping of a beautiful young heiress, the belle of the first ball of the season. His homage was accepted, and his mamma gave her cordial approval of his choice, since the young lady was one of her special favourites. Frau von Lindau, however, exacted from her hot-headed son a promise to be immediately reconciled to the man whom he had chosen to consider his foe. She herself indeed, without Emil's knowledge, wrote a highly flattering epistle to Otto, which the latter in his utter despair tossed unread into the fire.

Emil's letter to Frau von Arning, in addition to the announcement of the happy event, contained a request for her friendly offices as peacemaker between the writer and her daughter's lover.

At any other time Frau von Arning would gladly have congratulated her young friend upon his happy prospects, but

on this wretched morning his letter seemed an insult specially directed to her; there was not a line of it that did not provoke her indignation. It vexed her that Lindau could so quickly replace her child in his affection; it vexed her that he should proclaim his happiness just when she was more wretched than ever in her life before; and it vexed her beyond all that this betrothal should nip in the bud the schemes which her inventiv brain had already begun to devise.

This subject was, only lightly of course, touched upon in the conversation between Theresa and her old friend. Beatrice stood by, listening to her mother's emphatic expressions without uttering a syllable. But when the baron was about to take his departure, observing by way of consolation that "Heaven, after all, orders everything for the best, and Beatrice's deliverance from such a man as Arning now seems to be is cheaply purchased by the loss of her property," Fräulein von Arning followed him out on the terrace to the carriage door.

"Godpapa Tannen," she said, gravely, her eyes fixed upon his face with intense earnestness, "tell me, upon your conscience, do you believe it possible that Herr von Arning rejects me simply because I am not the heiress he thought me?"

The solemnity of this appeal rather embarrassed her old friend. Nevertheless, true to the conviction urged upon him by his indignation at Otto's behaviour, he replied, "My poor child, you know yourself how highly I always valued Arning, and God forbid I should do him injustice! But, painful as it is to me, I cannot see any other motive for his conduct. Do not take it so to heart, my dear girl! You are innocent of all the wretchedness of your unfortunate family, and I am firmly convinced that you will have ample compensation in the end for these trials you are now undergoing."

With no reply except a slight inclination of the head, Beatrice withdrew. "They all believe him guilty," she whispered to herself. "I alone cannot think him so, although the hap-

piness of my life has gone, never to return, in spite of what my godfather says. I could not endure being forced to despise him. Not that, not that; it would break my heart."

With such thoughts filling her mind, the girl re-entered the library. The candles had not yet been lighted; the large room was dark and silent except for a bright fire on the hearth that crackled merrily and threw a broad glare of crimson light upon the portrait of the old Freiherr on the opposite wall, lending life to the features and form as it stood out amid the surrounding gloom.

Beatrice paused, startled. During the reading of her father's last will she had kept her eyes riveted upon this portrait, and now when his kindly face suddenly shone out upon her thus, those moments recurred as if by magic in her memory. It was as if his lips uttered the words, "Learn to know your cousin Otto, and I am convinced you will esteem him."

Did she know him? Had she even an idea of the reasons for his conduct? No. Otto was not of those who display the better qualities of their nature, as a merchant does his wares, to catch the passing regard of men; she had scarcely had a glimpse of his true inner life. What cared she for any one's opinion, even that of Herr von Tannen, upon this matter? Otto himself was the only human being who could tell her why he acted thus and not otherwise.

Should she demand an explanation from him? At first she recoiled from the thought, but by degrees it won a firm footing in her heart. She wanted some key to the cause of all this unhappiness. There should be no fresh discord in her family from want of frankness and confidence.

"No, father," she said aloud, involuntarily raising her clasped hands towards the portrait, "the old curse shall not be transmitted. One frank, honest word shall remove it forever."

With throbbing pulses and breath coming quick and short,

she reached her own room and sat down to write. For one moment she hesitated in genuine womanly confusion at the idea of what Otto would think of the step she was about to take. But her whole training and education had been such as to develop strongly her individuality, and she had a largeness of nature that prompted her to pursue undeviatingly a course she judged to be right, heedless of the opinion of the world. Her hesitation passed away in a moment; her pen flew over the paper as she wrote:

"I must speak with you, and can easily understand that after what has happened you can scarcely desire to cross the threshold of our home. Still less can I visit you in yours. Therefore, I pray you to be to-morrow at ten o'clock beneath the King's Oak in the Repach forest, where you will meet me.

"BEATRICE VON ARNING."

Without a moment's delay she hurried down the stairs and slipped the letter hastily into the post-bag in the hall, for she was afraid lest if she waited longer her resolution would fail her. In half an hour the post-bag was carried to town by the post-boy, and the next morning his lost love's letter was in Otto's hands.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT snowed in the night, but towards morning a brisk wind sprang up and drove away the clouds, so that a bright blue winter sky bent above the whitened ground. The moor was one vast shining waste, and on its borders the King's Oak, with all its burden of a hundred winters, stretched giant arms above the low underbrush about its feet. It stood like a boundary-

ark between the estates of the relatives at feud, its light, ow-clad side turned towards Buchdorf, its dark side towards rmsdal. The snow had drifted high about its knees, and the th running beside it into the Repach forest looked like a fine in in delicate white marble. A wintry silence reigned around. here was no sound of woodland bird, no hum of bees upon the orland, and, noiseless as the landscape of which she seemed part, Brown Elsie was gliding along the path towards Buchrf. Her feet sank in the snow at every step, and she hid her ivering hands in the old green shawl that was tightly wrapped out her shoulders.

Her friend Warne had dispatched her to Buchdorf to see if atters there had taken the turn he desired. There was an mistakable expression of sullen discontent in her large black es as she stole along looking furtively about her. Suddenly faint rustling struck her ear; she stopped and listened; although the snow deadened every sound, her practised sense tected the approach of a man, and to spy upon the actions others had long been both her business and her amusement. he strained ears and eyes, and became aware of Otto von rning in the distance, advancing on the same path with herf, walking slowly, his gun on his shoulder, and evidently ried in thought.

A stream was near at hand; she slipped beneath the small idge that crossed it and hid herself among the rushes and fless bushes. The Freiherr came nearer; it did not escape r keen eye that the last two days had wrought a wonderful ange in his appearance. True, his face had always been ave, but never before had it worn so utterly hopeless an exession. At the sight Elsbeth felt anger rather than sorrow. It is his own fault," she thought, sullenly; "why did he ve the silly doll?"

Arning had now reached the King's Oak; to the spy's surise he went no farther, but took out his watch, cast a glance

around the wide plain of snow, and then stood leaning against the trunk of the tree, with his eyes steadfastly bent upon the ground, as if to shut out from his gaze what the next few minutes were sure to bring forth.

"He expects some one," Elsbeth thought, wonderingly. "Who can it be?"

She was not to remain long in doubt. From the opposite direction came Beatrice von Arning, carefully wrapped in furs. She walked on quickly without stop or stay, like one who gives herself no time to repent of some resolve about to be carried out.

The keen morning air had crimsoned her cheeks, there were no traces of tears in her eyes, her lovely face was set in an expression of firm determination.

At her approach the Freiherr awoke from his brooding reverie. "Beatrice," he cried, passionately, making as if to hasten towards her; but his lifted arm fell by his side. The lovelier and more gracious his love appeared to him, the deeper and more oppressive became his sense of his own unworthiness. Mute, motionless, with downcast eyes he awaited her.

Elsbeth half rose from her crouching posture, and strained every nerve to the utmost that she might lose no word of what was said.

"You are surprised, Herr von Arning," Beatrice began, with forced firmness, "that after all that has occurred I should ask to meet you *here*," and she glanced timidly around the snowy plain, "and perhaps you have judged my conduct with severity. I might have written what I have to say, but letters are very unsatisfactory and leave so much room for ambiguity that I thought it best to learn what I wished to know from your own lips, and if possible on this spot, where," she added, with a deep blush, "I first felt confidence in a man whom until then I had regarded as my implacable enemy."

Her voice had grown low and somewhat uncertain; there was a perceptible quiver in it as she went on:

"When my father's last will was read, in which he so earnestly admonishes us to learn to know each other, I made a solemn vow in my inmost heart that I would obey his desire. But a curse seems to lie like a spell upon our unfortunate family, and I think nothing can break it, save—absolute frankness. Therefore, Herr von Arning, I entreat you in my father's name,—you surely loved him once,—to tell me the reasons, however harsh and humiliating they may be for me, to tell me without reserve the reasons that have moved you to this sudden rupture of our engagement."

"Anything but that!" Otto exclaimed, as if awaking from some painful dream. "Anything but that! Be merciful, Beatrice! Is it not enough that you are lost to me forever? Must I also know and see how much you despise me?"

This passionate outburst amazed the young girl extremely, while at the same time it awakened within her a sensation that was unspeakably consoling. He did not, then, regard her with indifference. She replied, with greater assurance, "I think I am entitled to a knowledge of your reasons for so unexpected and harsh a dissolution of the tie between us; and yet I would resign my right to an explanation which evidently would cause you great pain, were it not that I do not demand it for my own sake alone, but for the sake of the honour of our family, and for your sake, Herr von Arning. Do you know what motives are ascribed to you? You must explain the reason for your conduct if you would save your honour from soil."

Otto had grown as white as the snow at his feet. Had Elsbeth already betrayed his secret? He gazed speechless in a kind of horror at Beatrice.

She too hesitated; the words would not come at her command. Still it must be done. "Answer me candidly, Herr von Arning," she went on by a supreme effort. "Do you

know nothing of the change in our circumstances with which half the province is ringing?"

"So help me heaven, no!" Otto cried, in amazement. "I have not crossed the threshold of my room for two days," he added, in a low tone.

"Baron von Tannen went to you to tell you all that had happened," Beatrice explained, "but you would not see him. To be brief, my mother can no longer retain Buchdorf. Warne has robbed her and left her involved in the hands of usurers. Baron von Tannen says that our floating capital is far from sufficient to pay the money due them, and the estate has been so impoverished by Warne's neglect that it is not worth half its former value. So there is no resource left us except to sell it." She bit her lip and paused, for she would not for the world shed a tear, and it seemed as if all the tears which she had withheld during the agitation of the last two days were determined to burst forth at this moment.

In listening to her distressing tale, Otto utterly forgot for the moment why he had come hither. "Sell Buchdorf!" he exclaimed, with all his old energy. "No, never! I will go back with you immediately, and investigate affairs on the spot. Frau von Arning knows nothing of business, and Tannen is easily outwitted in money-matters. Of course the scoundrels have reckoned upon that, and think to gain by sudden importunity what they could never obtain legally. I know Buchdorf and its true value. It has been badly managed. Warne was always a scoundrel in every respect. But it can still easily sustain an immense debt. I am convinced that it can be extricated from these present embarrassments at a small sacrifice, so soon as——"

The young baroness interrupted him with a deprecatory gesture. "Excuse me, Herr von Arning," she said, with a contraction of her delicate brows, "I did not come hither to complain, still less to entreat your aid. I informed you of

our present embarrassments solely because foolish reports connected them with the breaking of our engagement."

Otto had relapsed into his former hopeless attitude. "I understand," he replied, sadly. "And you, Beatrice, do you believe those reports?"

Something like a smile flitted across the girl's grave face. "Should I be here if I did?" she asked, gently. "No, neither money nor estate has part in what lies between us."

Otto hastily seized her hand and pressed it to his lips. "Thanks, Beatrice," he said. "You speak truly. But my guilt is far, far greater——"

"I must know what it is," Beatrice said, firmly.

Otto turned away. "Impossible!" he groaned. "Oh, Beatrice, you cannot dream of the intense cruelty of such a demand. The disgraceful confession you ask for would be hard enough for me if made to any human being. But to be condemned to read my sentence in your eyes,—not hell itself could inflict a greater torture."

Beatrice saw that in spite of his refusal the Freiherr was seeking words in which to accede to her request. The two seemed to-day to have exchanged characters. She, usually shy and timid, was full of firmness and determination, while he stood before her humbly and submissively. Beatrice was much affected by this change. "Courage, Otto," she whispered softly, almost tenderly, laying her hand lightly upon his arm.

At last Otto yielded and began a long explanation. He first described his position as a boy on the estate until his cousin's sudden marriage and the birth of Beatrice entirely changed his prospects. He spoke without looking up—fluently, coldly and clearly, like a judge impartially summing up the evidence for and against the accused, since only thus could he master his agitation. He went on to describe the abduction of the little heiress in all its particulars, even to those with which he had become acquainted within the last two days,

and without either denying or excusing his own indirect participation in the crime. He told of how later the lovely child had crept into his heart against his will; how at last he had loved her passionately without admitting it to himself until finally beneath this very oak his affection for her and its utter hopelessness had been made manifest to him. He had struggled against it with all the force he could muster, and even at the reading of her father's will would never have ventured to seek the hand of one so much younger than he had not her manner in giving him Lindau's letter awakened in him the hope that he was not quite indifferent to her. When his cousin's last will enjoined upon him the fulfilment of his own intense desire, he had not been able to resist his passionate impulse to woo her, and although during the short period of their betrothal he had had daily opportunity of learning and knowing that her childlike heart was still ignorant of love, and that only kindly feeling and a filial desire to fulfil a revered father's last wish had induced her to give the decisive assent, yet he had not been able to resign the enchanting dream that one day he might awaken within her some warmer feeling, until Elsbeth's revelations had annihilated his hopes forever.

Here he suddenly and abruptly concluded. During the whole time he had been speaking he had never lifted his eyes from the ground, and consequently was unaware of the impression his confession had made upon his auditor.

Her first painful surprise at the disappointment her birth had occasioned to Otto was entirely forgotten in the unspeakable rapture of hearing for the first time from his own lips how truly and passionately he loved her.

When after a pause he broke out with the words, "Oh, end this torture, Beatrice! Speak my doom, but for the love of mercy be quick!" she replied, with unaffected candour, "Your doom, Otto? What have I cared for in all that you have

said, except that in spite of my unworthiness you really love me?"

Otto looked up, but not yet could he yield to the rapture that filled him at sight of her beaming glance. "And my unnatural hatred of the innocent child," he murmured, "and the crime,——and your sickly childhood,——and——"

"And the care," she eagerly interrupted him, "the tenderness you accorded to the sickly child, bringing it back to life and health without one thought of self. Why do you not speak of that,—proud, haughty man that you are?—not my murderer, but my saviour; not a bridegroom forced upon me, but——" and her lovely face glowed to the very temples, yet she bravely completed her sentence, "my only love."

Otto clasped her passionately to the heart that was at last healed of all its misery.

Elsbeth heard no more; indeed what followed was whispered in so low a tone and with such frequent interruptions that it was impossible to make out a connected sentence from all that was said. But when Otto with his newly-won love upon his arm passed by the listener on the path to Buchdorf, she heard Beatrice say, "and you must forgive your aunt, Otto, as I do, for her crime was but a proof of her affection for you."

* * * * * * *

Elsbeth slowly arose as the lovers passed out of sight, and without looking round her returned to the moorland hut, the interior of which looked to-day more desolate than ever, for beneath the blue-checked curtains of the bed lay old Stina, cold and dead. A violent coughing-fit had put an end to her wretched existence in the middle of the night; there had been none to speak a word of consolation or to shed one tear beside her; her only companion had been her black favourite, which lay curled up upon the coverlet, mewing from time to time as if in wonder that the warmth he was wont to share had departed from his mistress's breast.

When Elsbeth entered the hut, for the first time in her life the girl was filled with a kind of weariness of existence. Many a one walks the earth beneath a heavy burden without groaning, when suddenly some apparently insignificant occurrence will call forth wild complaints from him who has endured far worse blows with apparent indifference, as the one last drop will cause the vessel filled to the brim to overflow. Otto's reunion with his love had been this last drop for Elsbeth.

From her childhood she had scarce known anything save evil at the hands of her fellow-mortals, and as she grew up she had learned to return this evil with interest, but negligently, instinctively, as some species of wild beasts habitually kill three times as much prey as they can devour. The Arning family feud had first inspired her with genuine interest; her heart had made itself felt in hatred of Beatrice, in love for the Freiherr. She had done all that she could to separate them, yet now when they were more truly united than ever she was not even tempted to be angry. She seemed to herself transformed. Beatrice's words still sounded in her ears, "you must forgive your aunt, as I do." Elsbeth had heard such words before, and had sneered at them as hypocritical, but she could not doubt that these were genuine and true.

She confessed involuntarily that she who could thus forgive must be vastly better than herself. The tears came into her eyes. She was overcome by a kind of compassion for herself, and for the first time in her life,—alas, too late!—she cast a glance that was almost tender towards her grandmother, the woman who had ill-treated her as long as her strength would permit, and whose unkindness she had repaid in kind. She was filled with something like remorse. She seemed to see in the image of the dead a picture of her own future. Thus homeless and restless she should roam through the world, thus lonely live, and thus forsaken and unwept die.

"Poor grandmother," she muttered, "you spoke truth when

you said that there were laws for the rich and happy different from those which we must obey. It is not hard to be good when every one is good to us," she continued, lifting her head with a kind of defiance in her air. "If I had been treated kindly, or if any human being had loved me, I might have been something better than I am; but now it is too late!"

She started at her own words. "Too late!" she repeated. "I am but twenty years old! No, it is not too late. I will go to America, where no one knows me. Men are all equal there, and rich; they will be kind to me."

She hurriedly removed the stone from the hearth, beneath which lay old Stina's hoardings and the money she had herself received from Otto.

The richest peasant girl in Ermsdal could not lay claim to as wealthy a dowry as this ragged beggar-maid held in her little brown hands. Yet spite of her riches no peasant would have dreamed of taking to his home as a bride the outcast grandchild of old Stina, nor did Elsbeth herself covet any such fate.

She had scarcely finished counting her store and hiding it away in the folds of her old wrap, when Warne entered the hut, and started in surprise at finding the girl there.

"What, you here, Elsbeth? he asked, hastily. "You must have flown, to be back already from Buchdorf."

"No, I have not flown," she replied, as curtly as ever, "nor have I been to Buchdorf. I learned all I wanted to know on the road thither, but it will hardly be much to your liking. Your Fräulein has made it all up with our master."

"Death and damnation!" exclaimed the steward. "Either you lie, or you do not know what you are saying!"

He had been rejoiced that Elsbeth's revelations had separated the lovers, for he had private doubts as to whether the loss of Buchdorf would alone have sufficed to do so.

"I see no reason for lying," the girl coolly replied, "and I

have eyes and ears that usually know what they are seeing and hearing. They made it all up beneath the King's Oak. I was hidden under the bridge, and heard every word. Take my advice, Herr Warne, and pack up your trunk, the sooner the better, for our master has gone to Buchdorf to look into your books. And although that old fool Tannen and the conceited Frau Baroness have looked in vain for what will tie a rope about your neck, Baron von Arning will be sure to do it. Your ruin in this world is as sure as your damnation in the next, my good friend."

Warne did, in truth, seem entirely overwhelmed by the girl's revelation. He stood motionless, his eyes fixed upon the ground, his face ashy pale, and made no reply to Elsbeth's advice.

The girl watched him narrowly; at last she approached him and laid her hand familiarly upon his arm. "I have stood by you honestly, Warne," she said, with unwonted gentleness. "Be kind to me now, and do not leave me behind when you cross the sea to that rich and happy America."

The man turned upon her in a fury. "Oh, I am to take you with me!" he sneered. "Are you mad? How do you know that I am going to America? And how dare you tell me to my face that an examination of my books can do me any harm?"

Her momentary gentleness had nowise weakened Elsbeth's penetration. She now folded her arms, and, standing opposite the steward, laughed in her old provoking manner.

"Softly, softly, my fine fellow. Do you ask how I dare? Look there. Behind those curtains where my grandmother now lies dead, I have passed many an interesting moment while she was dealing with Messrs. Aaron, Levi, and Katzenberg, and I chanced to be there also when you came to arrange your little surprise for the haughty Frau Baroness. In addition, I saw the use to which you put your blazing fire the night before

you left Buchdorf,—it is a shame the shutters in that old house will not close tightly. The ashes you made lie buried beneath the three lindens at Repach. What do you say to my paying a visit to the authorities at M—— and volunteering a little information? Could I procure you board and lodging at the public expense? Aye or no?"

"Viper!" the steward ground out between his teeth, stamping his foot in unavailing anger.

"What could lead you to imagine," the girl continued with quiet contempt, "that I would have dealings with men of your stamp without the reins to guide them well gathered up into my hands? You see it would hardly be prudent to leave me behind you. Besides," she said, with a haughty toss of her head, "I do not ask any alms of you. I am rich, richer than you think. My grandmother has left me gold enough."

At this mention of her possessions there was a dull glimmer in the steward's eyes; he bitterly regretted that his anger at the annihilation of all his schemes should have so startled him out of his smooth amiability of deportment, and tried to atone for his harsh words.

"It is not the expense that I think of, you foolish girl," he said, with an air of dignified magnanimity. "I would willingly have offered you a place in the vessel if I had supposed you were in earnest about going. I now see that you are so, and in fact you are right. And I had better go—you are right there too. Yes, we will go together. I will accord you my protection. Be quick then, child, and get ready—we have no time to lose."

Elsbeth laughed scornfully. "That is as it should be," she said with a nod. "I like you thus. You are quite clever enough to know that it is better to have Brown Elsie for a friend than an enemy. Speak good honest German to me always. I never know what you would be at with your fine words."

She then stepped to the bedside and put into her grand-

mother's cold hand some pieces of gold,—enough to ensure the old woman a decent burial. Then she untied the goat, and stroking the old black cat, took down from the chimney the flitch of bacon and left it on the ground for the poor animal's support.

After attending to all this, Elsbeth wrapped herself in her grandmother's old striped shawl, and, accompanied by the steward, departed from the scene of her joyless childhood.

The sun shone brightly, and the snow crackled beneath the feet of the silent pair. As they reached the forest, Elsbeth turned for one long, last look over her beloved moor. Alas! she did not dream that she was bidding farewell to what would hereafter seem to her a very Paradise. True, she had here suffered enough of hunger and pain, but what was it all in comparison with the wretched future that awaited her on the other side of the world, in the clutches of so unprincipled a wretch as Warne!

* * * * * * *

Otto had been perfectly right in surmising that the baroness's entire inexperience and her isolated position had emboldened the three usurers to act as they had done. The complication in her affairs was disentangled with ease, as soon as his energy and his credit were brought into play in her behalf, and his clear head detected at a glance several discrepancies in Warne's books, apparently insignificant, which were quite sufficient to enable him to institute legal proceedings against the faithless steward.

But all efforts made by the police throughout the province were fruitless to produce the criminal; he had disappeared.

An emigrant returning to Buchdorf several years afterwards reported that he had seen him in the California mines; but this was the last trace of him ever discovered. Nothing was ever afterwards heard of either himself or Brown Elsie in their old home.

Some peasant girls who secretly visited the moorland hut to ask counsel of Mother Stina found her corpse as Elsbeth had left it, and thanks to the money left by her grandchild the poor old creature received decent burial.

No one of the superstitious country-folk ventured to take possession of the dwelling or of the scanty furniture it contained, and thus the moorland hut remained for a long time unchanged both in interior and exterior, unvisited by any human being.

The black cat alone glided continually in and out of the open door, each day becoming wilder and thinner, vainly seeking warmth on the cold hearth, until he was found one morning frozen dead beneath the stunted birch where he had never omitted each evening to await his mistress's return.

After matters were once more in a prosperous way at Buchdorf, Baron Otto had the old hut pulled down, and turned his energies towards the improvement of the marshy waste, that the moor which had played so unedifying a part in the family history of the Von Arnings might be a source of blessing to future generations.

One year after their happy reunion, Otto brought home his bride, but not to the house that had impressed her so unpleasantly. In its stead there was a charming villa on the borders of the forest, now transformed into a picturesque park, and the doors of the new home were as hospitably open as the old tower had formerly been sternly closed to all the country round. Theresa delights to arrange there all kinds of festivities and social entertainments. She is enthusiastically fond of her son-in-law, and has gained much in power of attraction since the humiliation to which her misplaced confidence brought her has lessened her proud self-reliance.

Beatrice will always be the petted child we first knew her. The Freiherr, still grave and reserved to others, fairly idolizes her, and yields to her every wish. It was due to her

influence that he sought out the canoness, who had sullenly withdrawn to a small provincial town. But it was too late. Otto was only just in time to assure her of his forgiveness, and to close her weary eyes.

The entire neighbourhood rejoiced at the happy termination of the Von Arning family feud, but no one was made so thoroughly happy by it as old Herr von Tannen.

His "child of gold," as he was wont to call Beatrice, rose even still higher in his estimation, and he is never weary of telling to all who will listen how she succeeded where he had striven for years in vain. "And it was quite natural that it should be so," he always adds; "we outsiders can do nothing in family quarrels, even although we speak, as my poor friend did, from the grave. No, the only magic wand that can reunite a family at feud is entire confidence and thorough frankness on the part of its individual members."

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